



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES





THE HEART OF LIFE.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

A HUMAN DOCUMENT.

EIGHTH THOUSAND.

Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d.

THE

HEART OF LIFE.

BY

W. H. MALLOCK.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, Ld. 1895.

Digitized by the Internet Archive in 2008 with funding from Microsoft Corporation

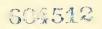
4972 M296 V.2

THE HEART OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

POLE had not proposed to Mrs. Steinberg to stay with her for more than a day or two. She was, therefore, hardly surprised, though she was voluble with hospitable remonstrance, when he told her that the following morning he should have to return home. So far as the friend was concerned to whom he had said good-bye, he would gain nothing by remaining at Thames Wickham, and he began to long for the seclusions and the ample solitudes of Glenlynn, where he would henceforth each morning, through the channel of a faithful letter, receive new life from an affection sublimated, not lessened, by distance.

Such being his happy belief, he was relieved, vol. II.



rather than disappointed, to learn from Mrs. Pole, on his arrival, that the visit of Countess Shimna O'Keefe would not take place for another week at all events. Her image, during his absence, had hardly crossed his mind; and now, when circumstances were naturally bringing it back to him, he was irked by recollecting the interest he had suffered himself to feel in her personality.

He knew, by a study of posts and by reflection on probabilities, that it would be a good three days before one of those letters could reach him from which he expected to derive so much comfort, so he was freed meanwhile from the anxiety which often, by its wear and strain, more than outweighs the comfort which such letter-writing really brings. He accordingly returned, with a new spirit and energy, to his official work and his local schemes of philanthropy; and his mother, who watched him with a keenness of which she was hardly herself conscious, was pleased to observe in him a buoyancy which she only realized he had lost when its sudden return reminded her how in youth he had once possessed it.

A part of his good spirits, however, was attributable to another cause; and this was

the presence of two little Pole twins, cousins of his, about seven years of age, who had been offered by their mother for a week to Mrs. Pole's care, and who invaded Glenlynn with their nurse on the day after that of his return. They were children of charming manners. They moved about the house like sunshine, and Miss Drake, in their honour, begirt herself with an antique reticule, out of which, at odd moments, she administered French plums to them. The very shadows in the passages seemed to grow young at their presence. But to no one was their companionship more grateful than to Pole. He told them fairy-stories, which they were never tired of hearing, and to which their imagination imparted the terrors and the delights of truth; and they in return questioned him about the Deity and the fall of man, about goodness and free will, with the prodigious rationalism of childhood, on which the shrewdest philosopher has never been able to improve.

Thus for a time the hours danced along, and Pole found that his work and his serious thoughts were caressed and cheered by every incident of the day—by the sound of the prayer which Dr. Clitheroe offered up, as he knelt before the breakfast-things; by the

object lesson in happiness which the little children gave; and by the fair hope of a letter which hovered over every morning.

At last the letter came; but the moment he took it in his hands his heart sank a little, the feel of it was so unsubstantial. It consisted, in fact, of but half a sheet of note-paper, on which were scribbled a few disjointed sentences, thanking him for a letter which he himself had written, and expressing regret at the hastiness of the present answer. There was, however, this postscript, "Always be a friend to me," and the writer began with "My very dear Mr. Pole," and signed herself "Yours, and indeed yours only." When he thought of his own letter, here acknowledged so curtly, when he thought of how frankly he had put his most intimate thoughts in it, his face wore a look of pain on finding that they were all ignored; but his mind at the same time was framing excuses for his correspondent, and night again brought hopes of something better from her next morning. But next morning there was nothing from her at all. Many mornings followed, and there was still nothing. Each day, nevertheless, he wrote to her much as heretofore, except that insensibly his letters grew

somewhat shorter, and little by little the spirits which he had recovered were deserting him;—a fact detected by the children, and the children only, who afforded him thus, what they had not done previously, a certain ground for dissatisfaction with the precocity of their intellectual powers.

Meanwhile, if his body could have taken wings with his mind, could it have crossed the blue sea-levels, across which he looked so often, and reached the mysterious country hidden beyond the hazy headlands, he would have found himself amongst scenes which strangers seldom visit, but which, in addition to much that is picturesque and curious, would to him have exhibited something far more interesting than themselves.

At the end of a branch line which penetrates as far as the border of the scenes in question, is an odd little Welsh town, most of whose houses have an air of extreme antiquity, owing to the fact that their stones have been quarried out of a huge abbey, a fragment of which still towers above their chimneys. Had Pole arrived at the station of this town, and named to the solitary cabman, who met the infrequent trains, the place to which he

desired to be taken, he would have been driven away into a country of hills and of shady hedgerows, with mountains showing occasionally their purple walls in the distance. He would have been struck as he went by the undisturbed simplicity of everything-of the soft-voiced countrymen who would have touched their hats to him as he passed; by the old barns and farmsteads; by the antique roadside inns, occurring at long intervals; and the microscopic village shops, displaying a dim vision of peppermint-balls, stay-laces, and streaky sides of bacon. Gradually he would have found these signs of human life grow rarer, and a certain bleakness would have stolen over the landscape, till at length he would have seen between some shoulders of bare plough-lands, momentary glimpses of the sea; whilst as for the country itself, there would have been hardly a tree visible to him, except for one long belt of dark-green woodland in front of him, which bounded his view, raising its ragged fringes into the sky. As he neared this woodland, he would have noticed many fine and ancient trees; but what would have struck him most would have been the prevalent neglect and overgrowth. Presently he would have reached

a pair of dilapidated gates and a carriagedrive, green with weeds, and shadowed by lean laurels. At the end of this drive, half hidden in leafage, he would have seen before him a gate-house flanked by two loop-holed towers, and an archway beyond whose shadows was a medley of old grey buildings.

Such was the entrance to the curious castle of St. Owen's, which for seven hundred years had never changed hands except through direct or indirect inheritance, and during all that period had never been uninhabited. The male line of Masters having ended in the reign of Charles II., it had passed, by marriage with an heiress, to a family of the name of Price, and the bridegroom, thanks to his services against Oliver Cromwell, had been turned by his grateful sovereign into Sir David Price Masters. For more than a century onwards the house of Price Masters flourished. Its baronets wore as fine lace ruffles and velvets as ever were seen at the courts of the first three Georges; nobody drank harder, had servants with finer liveries, or gained the esteem of ministers by the possession of more boroughs. But as though to teach the neighbourhood that not even the noblest qualities, and the most precious

possessions, can insure permanence to anything here below, the family at the end of the eighteenth century, began obviously to decline. The then baronet was childless: and to solace himself for the want of children. he had resolved to spend as much as was possible of the fortune, which, had they existed, he would willingly have saved for and transmitted to them. He succeeded beyond his hopes; and not being a religious man, his chief solace on his death-bed was the reflection that the distant cousin, his heir-an obscure person who had married the daughter of a country doctor-would inherit hardly a quarter of the income he might have reasonably expected. The heir, however, proved heir to more than his amiable predecessor had anticipated; for he apparently succeeded to all the extravagant tastes of the family, without the means or the knowledge which might have enabled him to indulge them like a gentleman. The result was one to which there are many parallels. The house of Price Masters, though not actually impoverished, and though still continuing to possess and to inhabit its ancient dwelling, declined socially in habits, connections, and prestige, till its former position became little

more than a memory. The Lovelaces and the Lotharios who had represented it in the last century, were followed by rude squireens who spoke and dressed like farmers, who exacted their droits de seigneur from milkmaids and farmers' daughters, who drove home drunk in gigs from the nearest markettown, and whose wives and sisters were even more provincial than themselves, and occasionally, like their brothers and husbands. developed an interest in the cellar. two generations of this obscure profligacy, the property with its ancestral honours,the former crushed with mortgages—devolved on a man of sixty, who, though too infirm to impoverish himself in the pursuit of pleasure, contrived to injure his castle by the gratification of what he called his taste. Having never been acquainted with anybody except himself who even professed to understand what taste was, his ideas of Gothic restoration were not of the most satisfactory nature. He surmounted the principal archways with certain devices in stucco, which purported to be the arms of the aboriginal kings of Wales; he spiked his mouldering turrets with a forest of stucco pinnacles; his baronial hall he wainscoted with varnished deal; he made

his floors hideous with heraldic Brussels carpets; and a Bristol upholsterer procured for his principal living-rooms a staring wall-paper, adorned with spurs and battle-axes. Death alone arrested him in this course of improvement; and Sir Hugh Price Masters, the new head of the family, was as incapable of discriminating between bad taste and good, as he would have been of discriminating between classical Latin and mediæval. An old castle to him was nothing but an odd and inconvenient house, the possession of which, nevertheless, imparted a fresh swagger to his shoulders.

In spite of improvements, however, St. Owen's Castle was a place of singular interest. It was built irregularly round two court-yards. It was roofed with weather-beaten shingle; and its structure, at odd angles, was diversified by staircase turrets, and squat crenellated towers. On one side of it was a deep and wooded ravine, in the bottom of which was a church half hidden by yew-trees; whilst the principal front opened on an old-world garden, which slanted down in untidy terraces to the sea, hiding its shape and extent in honeysuckle and neglected shrubberies. Totally indifferent as its new

possessor was to everything in this place except the social importance which he attributed to it, his young wife, when she entered it, felt herself transported into fairyland. The plumes of enchanted princes rustled on the winding stairs. Cavaliers with silken love-locks strayed along the garden walks. Cromweil, who had occupied the castle for six weeks, and of whose cannon some were still rusting upon the lawn, would re-enter the dining-room, and drink from a huge "black Jack." Her stepdaughter, now about twelve, who had hitherto seemed somewhat stolid, to a certain extent was excited by the influence of the place likewise; and her little boy, for some unfathomable reason, would laugh and clap his hands at the old walls and towers.

As for her husband, during the weeks when they were there together, most of his time was spent in the stable-yard; and except about practical matters he rarely exchanged a word with her. But they were both of them now, for the first time in their lives, sensible of some common external interest; and this provided them with a ground on which they could meet either amicably, or indulge in impersonal differences which masked the

existence of more intimate ones. His sole idea, for instance, with reference to his future establishment, was the idea that he ought to have a great many more servants than he had ever had in his life, and that as many as possible should be in livery; and numerous battles were fought by his wife with him over this, before she succeeded in convincing him that with less than three thousand a year, a butler and a half-grown footman formed the utmost retinue that would be required by them. But as to most of their domestic arrangements she had her own way entirely; and he not only did not contradict, he did not even assist her.

Still, in spite of the household duties thrust on her, she found ample time for the enjoyment of her novel dreams; and now that her husband was absent, and she, with her child and step-child, had returned to her strange kingdom, with nothing left to jar on her, the beauty and the wonder of her lot began to tinge her imagination every day with brighter and more mysterious colours. Constitutionally gifted with shrewdness about many practical matters, and carrying in her memory one great experience, she yet looked at life with the eyes of a wondering child;

and the newness of her present situation fell on her heart like dew. Every room in the house was a new country to be explored; every poor old cabinet or battered wardrobe was a mystery; and as for the library, dark with neglected leather, when she ran her eyes along the titles on the dusty shelves, suggestions filled the air for her, like the music of some enormous organ. These experiences lifted her off her feet; she floated, she no longer walked; and others supervened presently, which, though seemingly more prosaic, touched her quite as deeply.

It was no sooner known that Sir Hugh had departed for America, than all the county neighbours, within a radius of fifteen miles, drove—and the distance was seven miles for the nearest—to call on the young and beautiful mistress of St. Owen's; and at the same time, she found that her acquaintance was sought also by other and very different visitors, whose number increased daily. These last were the poor of the neighbouring village, who came to her with their plaintive eyes, like so many hungry birds. Both sets of visitors, each in its own way, touched her. The squire's wives and

daughters, most of them homely people, met her with a mixture of good will and respectful admiration, which filled her with a longing for the wifely excellences they imputed to her; whilst the poor seemed, by applying to her, to endow her with new faculties. She felt almost inclined to kiss the infirm old women; and discovering that some of them spoke only Welsh, she resolved to learn the language, and worked for three days at it, with an eagerness born of the idea that on the fourth day she would be mistress of it. Every hour, in fact, was filled with action, or the agitations of fancy; and duties, with shining breasts, came settling on her like flocks of pigeons. a word, circumstances were so arranging themselves for her as to allow her nature, for the first time in her life, to satisfy its sensitive eagerness without any clandestine hazard, and to exercise many of its faculties, whose existence, till the present time, had made itself felt only in the vague restlessness that resulted from them.

This being her condition, it is perhaps not unintelligible that a certain part of her past, tragic alike in the intensity of its joys and sadness, should now begin to appear to her in a new and alien light, and that she should shrink from the memory of it for two opposite reasons—the one being the fear that she might find herself too faithless to it, the other the fear that she might find herself too faithful. Her instinctive policy was, therefore, to put it gently aside, and rock it to sleep in some shadowy corner of her consciousness; and though she could not be angry, she was tempted to feel aggrieved and fretful when a voice from without appealed to her, and tried to disturb its slumbers. Such was the mood in which she received the letters of one who a year ago had been more than all the world to her; and who, little as she knew it, had, on more than a few occasions, supplied her with the means of living, when her husband's extravagances or forgetfulness would have literally left her destitute. It said much for his tact that she never even suspected her obligations to him; nor was he in this way less successful now, as was shown by the gratified, and yet perfectly blank, surprise with which, about this time, she received the following communication, bearing the signature of a local firm of solicitors:-

" Madam-

"We have the honour to write to you, in accordance with the instructions of a client, who, for family reasons, desires to remain unknown, except as regards the fact that his conduct in this matter is due to an interest arising from consanguinity. Our client has instructed us to place to your credit, quarterly, at the branch in this town of the Glamorgan and South Wales Banking Company, a certain sum, the payment of which will be duly notified to you, to be used by you at your discretion, for the benefit of your eldest son; or, in the event of his death, for any purpose, or in any way, you may deem advisable.

"We have the honour to be, madam, your ladyship's obedient servants,

"Llewellyn, Rhyss, and Lewis."

When she received this letter her little son happened to be with her, and, with suddenly brimming eyes, she stooped down and kissed him; and she ran off, laughing, to an interview with the old coachman. Every day in her veins the pulse of life beat quicker; and every day the letters which reached her from Glenlynn, though she read

them not without feeling, became more difficult to answer. It is easier for the saint to be intimate with the chief of sinners, than it is for hope and excitement to talk to regret and sadness. Nothing in the world can harden the heart like hope.

CHAPTER II.

POLE, accordingly, waited from day to day, happy only in his ignorance of how little he had to wait for. His first burst of happiness had faded like the rose of morning, and every barren budget of letters stung him like a drift of hail. The walls of Glenlynn, with all their friendly shelter, gradually grew transparent, and showed the outer darkness of the infinite and forlorn void. Dr. Clitheroe's household prayers fretted him like a feeble mockery; and when he went with his mother and the children to Mr. Godolphin's church, that hospitable house of faith seemed to him like a roofless cottage, and the altar like a burnt-out hearth, which would never again warm anybody. Finally, however, a day came when the second post brought him one letter only, and when he looked at it he could hardly believe his eyes.

He saw on the envelope the writing for which he had so long hungered.

He hastened with his treasure into the garden; but the very beginning chilled him. It was "Dear Mr. Pole" simply, without even the kindly touch that would have been given to it by the possessive pronoun. It continued in this way—

"A thousand thanks for your news. How pleasant your life seems! I like so much to hear about it. Please go on writing, even if I can't reply. I am such an uncertain person -I mean so far as leisure goes. I have so much to settle and think about. Each afternoon, for instance—my only time for letters -I have had to ask neighbours here, or else go to tea with them myself. I was, indeed, to have gone somewhere to-day-to a luncheon party, ten miles off; but it rained so, I couldn't. In consequence of this, at last I have a few quiet hours; and the first thing I do-as you see-is to write to you. Shall I tell you about this place? I will, if it won't bore you. It is so big, I am almost frightened at it; and I and the chicks play hide and seek in the passages; and we never should find each other if it wasn't that we burst out laughing. I am getting to feel so grand; but of course it is very silly of me; and you, who have seen so many splendid places, would not think much of this, half-furnished and tumble-down as it is. But there is one thing I'm sure you would admire, and that is the library. It is forty feet long, and there are old brown books all round it. No one has used it for more than fifty years. I spend hours there, and it feels like an enchanted forest."

The letter was, no doubt, one which could have been addressed only to a person for whom the writer had a feeling of close friendship; but of anything more than friendship there was not a single trace.

Stung with suffering, he hastened in to answer her; and as he wrote he felt his resentment grow. Then suddenly he pushed the paper from him. "No, no," he said, "I've not the heart to be hard on you. Perhaps I shall get a kinder letter from you tomorrow." He knew, however, how doubtful this hope was; and the following day it was extinguished. That day moreover the two children departed; and as he stood at the door, and saw the carriage drive away with them, he felt as if the last ray of sunlight had taken its leave also. Then, retiring to

his room, he slowly and painfully composed the following letter:—

"Do not be frightened," he began, "when you see the number of pages, which will, I know, be covered by what I am going to say. It will be only for once, Pansy, that you will find me so prolix a correspondent; and you will find nothing here to make you angry, and very likely nothing that will make you even sorry.

"I must go back a little; but I will touch on things very lightly. I will not dwell on the past. I will only ask you to think of it. Do you remember that unfrequented little German spa, with its shabby Kursaal and great straggling gardens? And do you remember a tall, white house with net window curtains, and red velvet furniture, and distorting mirrors, and the coloured print of Bismarck that used to hang just over your writing-table? And do you remember a certain chair under some trees, not very far from the kiosque where the band played? One day, soon after I knew you, and you thought that I was not coming, you sprang up from that chair when you saw me. I can see your face now. I thought that no one had ever been glad to see me before. If you can forget those days it is useless for me to remind you of them. If you do not forget them, it is unnecessary. I can only say that you seemed to me more single-hearted and more intense in your affection than I imagined any woman could be; and the whole idea of love, through you, was transfigured in my imagination.

"Well, I will not insult you by doubting your absolute sincerity at that time; and I will not—I cannot—bitterly as I now feel its consequences—dishonour that time, by condemning it. Deliberately neglected as you were—deliberately pushed aside out of his life—by the sole person who had any right to duty from you—— But why need I go on? You know it all, as well as I do. And if you came to me now, under the same circumstances, you should find me as you then found me, or different only because I should be more thoughtful for you.

"And yet, ought I to say this to you? But it is idle discussing the question; for those circumstances never can be repeated; and you and I can never again meet each other as we met then. We are both different. I am related to you, and you to me; and all eternity cannot expunge that fact. We never

again can be as if our past had not been. There are some memories which you never can make not mine. The only question is, how this past is to be judged by us; for on that will depend our future.

"And now, listen to me. I am going to speak for myself. Whatever we may, or may not, have to repent of, of my past relation to you, in itself, I tell you frankly I do not repent. I cannot. I have been true to you. I have been more than true to you. All my thoughts of self I have subordinated to thoughts of you; not, Pansy, that there was much self-denial in that, for where self used to be there you were instead of it. Have I not proved this? Think over all these years and let your thoughts answer. And if I thus respected my own attachment to you, much more have I respected yours to me. I have identified it with everything that is sacred in the impulses of the human heart. Dear, you can never know how profoundly I have believed in you. And if I were to treat our past relations lightly, I should be treating lightly everything that makes human life valuable.

"Well; so much for the past. Now for the present. Events have taken place which

could never have been foreseen by either of us; they have opened before you a new path, and perhaps have almost forced you to choose it. In moments of bitterness, I confess, it has seemed strange to me, that this mere chance advent of certain external things, should so easily draw you back to a partnership not in itself congenial to you. thoughts like these are unfair. Things being as they are, I cannot but understand that the path you have now chosen is obviously the path of duty. You are right in choosing your big house and your library forty feet long, and in paying for them by renouncing me. You are right; you are right. How many people you will be able to help now! How much you will be able to do even for your companion! And, Pansy, no doubt there will be a simplicity in your inner life now, the loss of which, through me, was always a secret pain to you. I know all this. I feel it as keenly as you do, and I would not tempt you back to any more doubtful fate. For me, then, good-bye to much. Good-bye! Have you any idea of how much? I will not try to tell you. I will try to make you realize something which is quite different-not how much I say good-bye to, but how much I

keep, and must keep, and would not get rid of if I could. Do you wish me to get rid of that longing for you which makes me stretch my hands towards you across the waves now dividing us? Do you wish that longing to diminish? Do you wish it to become less tender? And do you wish another thing, or do you think another thing possible? I mean, do you think it possible that I can forget a something that is not yours-but yours and mine-ours for ever and ever? Do you think that I have no feeling? Would you wish me to feel nothing? If you would not wish that, then think-have I no claim on you? Are there no links that still bind us together-links that are living still-links not dead but changed?

"I ask you this, because you act as if there were none, or rather as if you could take up your end of them and drop it at your pleasure, just as if they were a bell-pull, and there was nothing human at the other end. You ask me to come to you. I come. You tell me you are glad to see me; you beg me to help you and support you by my example and my sympathy. I go away. I write to you. I try to be all I can to you. I try to appeal to every thought and feeling which I

imagine you hold sacred. And what do you do? You simply turn your back on me. I put my soul into your hands—I whom you used to watch and wait for—I who am related to you by the closest of all ties; and your only answer is to give me the dimensions of your library.

"You think, perhaps—for you have often said something of the kind—that because I am clever, as you say, and occupied with great interests, your unkindnesses either do not pain me, or that I ought to bear them philosophically. How little you know of the truth of things. Philosophy can influence love in one way only, and that is by killing it. So long as intellect and philosophy allow his love to live, the wisest man and the strongest man is as easily wounded as the weakest. I could perhaps kill my love for you. I could insult, defile, and then murder your memory, and free myself in this way of you and of the pain you cause me. But that is the only way. And do you think I would have recourse to it? I would as soon strike you with my fist on your lips, in your eyes, or on your breast, as dishonour my own feelings for you-those feelings which thus place me at your mercy. So

you ought not to despise me when you see how you can make me suffer.

"But I have not yet said all I want to say -or even the chief thing. Did the pain you give me end with myself, I could bear it silently, or I would complain of it as little as I could. But the bitterest part of it does not consist of my own sense of being neglected by one I value. It consists in the altered view you force me to take of yourself, by showing yourself capable of treating me in this undeserved way. I believe the bitterness of all ill-treatment at the hands of those we love, springs not from any misery which they may inflict on ourselves directly: but from the injury they inflict on our cherished thoughts of them, by doing it. Ah, Pansy-all you can do now is to write to me: and if you do not write often at least make me think that you would do so, if it were possible: and when you do write, say some words of human kindness to me. Is it a great deal that I ask of you? Would ten minutes each day, or every other day-ten minutes stolen from a visit to a country neighbour, or a game of hide and seek, or from dipping at random into old books, be too great a sacrifice for you to make

when it would save me from days of misery? Would you not naturally make a much greater sacrifice to assuage the pain of any stranger you might encounter by the roadside? Why should you treat me so much worse than him?"

Whilst Pole was waiting for a reply to this, a letter came to his mother from Countess Shimna, in which she suggested a near day for her visit. It was impossible for him to object, though his immediate impulse would have been to do so. Ordinary conversation was becoming daily more difficult to him, owing to the abstraction caused by his growing pain and uncertainty; and he felt at first that the presence of a comparative stranger—especially a stranger whom he had treated with so much unconventional attention - would demand of him efforts which he would be quite unable to make. But second thoughts completely reversed this view. Countess Shimna, he told himself, would at all events be a distraction; and whilst waiting for an answer to his letter, any distraction would be welcome. That day was Wednesday. She proposed to come on Saturday. On Saturday morning Pole

received a telegram. Its words were these:-"Letter arrived all right. Answer follows in day or two. P. Masters." This message was half a relief to him; half a cause of anxiety. Her telegrams once had been always signed "Pansy;" and the torturing suspiciousness of disregarded affection made him fear that her present use of initial and surname was a sign that his appeal had estranged rather than touched her. But then again, he reflected, this might not be so. She might have had, quite possibly, to send the message by a servant; and been so formal in her language on that account solely. What could be more likely? And to telegraph at all was itself an act of consideration. At all events he determined to hope and to believe the best till her letter for good or evil should turn his doubts to certainty. In this mood he began with positive eagerness, to look forward to the hour of Countess Shimna's coming; and to think of her as a person who would keep his hopes intact by preventing his mind from re-examining them too closely.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN men or women suffer from any deep wound in their affections, they often repel the idea of any distraction whatsoever which an interest, however slight, in a new acquaintance may offer to them; but when once such an idea is admitted, and the opportunity of realizing it approaches, a thrill will sometimes pass through their shattered and aching nerves, which, although such inconstancy as it may imply, is expiated by the pain it causes, has more of fugitive pleasure in it than they understand, or are willing to admit. And thus Pole, when the hour approached which was to bring Countess Shimna with it, was alternately exhilarated at the thought of her, and miserable at discovering that he was so. His misery, however, was powerless to repel her image. Her slight foreign accent began to whisper in his ears. He remembered her teeth, her nostrils, the way her hair grew on her neck, the turn of her head, and other like trifles. She was to come from Lyncombe in the launch, and he had intended to have met her at the landing-stage; but when the moment came, his resolution, in spite of his recent thoughts, failed him. Instead of meeting her he went for a long walk, and did not return to the house till it was time for him to prepare for dinner.

On quitting his room as soon as he had finished dressing, he fancied he heard in the distance a rustle of silk and petticoats, whose faint rhythm differed in some subtle way from any that accompanied the movements of Miss Drake or his mother; and as he went down the staircase in the dim summer twilight, some strange perfume was just perceptible in the air. Faint as it was, it stirred his imagination like a breeze stirring a tree. Once more his mind was filled with music and lamp-lit gardens, with a movement of gay crowds and whispers in shady places. Theatres glittered; the voices of singers rang; the wild oats of his youth sprouted again, and looked like roses. This all took place in the course of a few seconds. whilst his feet, treading the old Brussels. stair-carpet, were bringing him from the middle landing to the mat before the drawing-room door. When he entered the room, glimmering with its chintzes and the backs of books, what first accosted his eyes was a white and purple something which had the fresh and illuminating effect of a great bowl of flowers. Lightly, but without haste, this coloured something rose, and Pole in another moment was welcoming Countess Shimna. He hastily looked round him. Nobody else was down. He and she were alone together amongst the soft and diffused shadows.

They exchanged one look and one clasp of the hands, which seemed like a recognition of some common memory, not to be alluded to in any other way. Then he talked to her trivially about Lyncombe, and his recent absence, and watched the evening light on her arms and hands and dress. It was a dress of ivory-coloured silk, with the purple of a heart's-ease relieving it here and there, and he recognized in every fold of it the perfection of that evanescent art which, whatever philosophers may say of it, is beauty's daintiest handmaid. Her presence filled the room with a troubling and unwonted atmosphere, and distracted him, for

the moment, into forgetfulness of his own pain. He glanced at her fringe of hair curling crisply upon her forehead. He saw that there glittered in it a minute spray of diamonds, and on a narrow band of velvet another was glittering at her throat. But for some reason or other he shrank from again meeting her eyes; she, too, when she spoke, looked pensively on the ground, and their voices became so low that any one standing at the door would have thought them entirely silent, or exchanging some impassioned confidence.

But their tête-à-tête did not continue long. Mrs. Pole soon entered, with Miss Drake waddling after her, and then came Dr. Clitheroe, eager to be fascinated again, and smelling of his washhand-stand, and brown Windsor soap. Pole and Countess Shimna changed their demeanour as if by magic, and talked and laughed with a semblance of that singular interest in trifles which forms the presumed foundation of all our social intercourse. Pole was again struck by the versatility of the girl's nature as shown in her sudden transition from pensiveness to a soft vivacity. At dinner, when the candles shone on her, she attracted the eyes of every one,

lighting up the table like some delicate hothouse flower. She had many questions to answer with regard to the Lyncombe lodgings, and it appeared that her mother had taken for her the prettiest small house in the place—a thatched cottage looking over the sea, and completely secluded in a little thicket of larches. It appeared further-and this was the most exciting part of her gossip -that some old foreign servants were very shortly to arrive for her, and that very possibly a little baby cousin was to be sent there also with its nurse, its parents, for some reason, being unable to do their duty by it, and Countess Shimna's mother having generously undertaken to supply their place. Mrs. Pole's opinion of the rouged and yachting Countess rose for a moment when she first heard this intelligence, but it came fluttering down again, not without a sense of amusement, when she realized that her kindness was to be done vicariously through her daughter; and she admired the daughter the more for the pleasure with which she looked forward to doing it.

Later on, when Pole and Dr. Clitheroe, having been unusually quick over their wine, found their way to the drawing-room, the

first thing which they saw was a card-table with cards and candles on it, and Mrs. Pole, informing them that Countess Shimna was well accustomed to whist, and also that Miss Drake was willing to take a hand, proposed a rubber as a means of passing the evening. Miss Drake once more contributed to the hilarity of the company by revealing the fact that she was far from an indifferent player, having had considerable practice in Miss Pole's earlier days, and when at last, excited out of her natural stiffness, she exclaimed to Dr. Clitheroe that he had neglected her call for trumps, Countess Shimna, with laughing eyes, laid her delicate finger-tips on one of Miss Drake's mittens, and said-

"Miss Drake, you must teach me. Miss Drake knows a great deal more than she is willing that we should any of us suspect. I'm sure, if she liked, she could teach a great deal to all of us."

Whist is a game which either silences conversation or creates it. In the present instance it had the latter effect, continuing to offer occasions for that easy and obvious banter which promotes good fellowship so much better than wit does, and almost calls

to life again the irresponsible spirits of the nursery. At the same time Countess Shimna's fan, which lay beside her, with its sticks of carved mother-of-pearl, and powdered shepherds and shepherdesses kissing each other on the painted chickenskin, flavoured the hour curiously with suggestions of an alien world.

The following day was Sunday. Pole came down to breakfast with all his sorrow renewed by one more disappointment. He had hoped against hope for a letter, but none had come, and his pain had been no more cured by the distractions of his guest's company, than a broken leg is cured by the process of not thinking about it. Fortunately for him, however, some urgent and unexpected business claimed his attention, and forced him completely out of himself. had, since his return from London, despite all his personal vicissitudes, used his practical talents with so much purpose and energy, that plans for his proposed buildings had been completed some days ago; and the bailiff coming to him with a rough estimate for their erection, the two were shut up together till very nearly dinner-time. this separation from Countess Shimna's society increased his sense of its charm when he came back to it in the evening. After dinner she sang. The pieces she chose were sacred, one of them being a hymn to the Virgin, called "Stella Maris," whilst the other was supposed to be a lullaby of the Divine Mother over her Child. The singer's voice was low and sweet and vibrating, like human passion which had just been transfigured into prayer, and which was still shy and humble with the newness of the untried change. Its echoes were in Pole's ears when he found himself alone in his bedroom, and they kept him wakeful and restless with new thoughts about the singer, investing her with the depth and the mystery of a night with stars shining in it. In spite of the feeling exhibited in her last song, she did not impress him with a sense of what the religious world calls goodness; but rather of something else, he could not distinguish what. There was nothing in her eyes or bearing with which a saint could have found fault, and yet even in her girlishness there was freshness rather than innocence. But one definite impression she left in his mind, at all events, and this was that she was possessed of a certain kind of refinement

which would occupy the ground, should there be such, left vacant by conscience, and that she would be as jealous of her dainty dignity as any woman could be of her honour. Before she arrived he had hoped that her visit would be a brief one. He was now conscious of a wish that it might be prolonged. But his thoughts of her had nothing in them that conflicted with his thoughts of another woman, or that even relaxed the tension of these last, although for intervals they made him forget its tortures.

The following day his condition was worse than ever, but once again an unexpected pressure of work, kept him till the evening almost constantly occupied. He had lately been sending some sections of his official report as he finished them to his chief, Lord Henderson, who happened to be with the Duke at Dulverton; and there was one section of special importance and interest, which Lord Henderson was anxious, if possible, to have before he left for Norway. This, by dint of concentrated and unusual effort, Pole finished before the ringing of the dressing-bell, and despatched it by a groom, who would catch a night-train at Lyncombe,

and, sleeping at Dulverton, return the following day.

His hard work was the parent of sound sleep. He slept till his servant woke him, and put into his hands a letter, and drawing the blinds up revealed a stormy morning. The letter was the one which he had been looking for all these days. He waited till he was alone and then he tore it open. He had hardly glanced at a line or two before his hand dropped heavily on the bed, and it was many minutes before he resumed his reading.

"Dear Mr. Pole," the letter ran. "Forgive me for having been so long in answering you, but I really have not known exactly what to say. At first, when I got yours, I began to feel so sorry for you; but now, when I have come to consider everything more calmly, I must confess that I think you most unreasonable. I had fancied, when I told you about the library and my games with my children, and my silly little gossip about my tiresome neighbours and their teaparties, that you would have taken this as a mark of my confidence in your friendship, and that you would not have despised my day of little things. I thought you would

have cared to hear of the details of my humdrum life. But if you want from me so much more than I can give, and are angry with me for not giving it, you will make me so shy and so afraid of you, that I shall be unable to write at all. Oh, do be reasonable and not make things unnecessarily difficult. Let me be myself a little, and feel myself of some use in the world. I hardly dare to tell you that even to write this to you, I have had to keep the gardener waiting for half an hour, and I must now go and see him about some new flower-beds. Most of next week I shall be visiting poor people; but I hope by-andby I shall have more leisure, and be able, if you care to hear from me, to write to you more agreeably. I am ever sincerely yours,

"P. M."

He read this and thrust it back in its envelope, with the haste of a man touching a handle of hot iron; but throughout the morning he clung to the forlorn hope that when he came to read it again, it might seem less absolutely heartless. He was also distracted somewhat from the pain that was thus caused him, by the fact of the groom, who had been sent last night to Dulverton,

not having returned by either of the two early trains. He was expected back by ten. Had he missed the first train, there was another which would have enabled him to reach Glenlynn by twelve. But luncheon time came and nothing had yet been heard of him. Towards the end of the meal, however, a letter was brought to Pole. "Robert," said the butler, "was detained at Dulverton, in order that his lordship might be able to send you this." Pole glanced at the contents. A phrase or two caught his eye, and he slipped the letter into his pocket where another was already lying. The phrases which he had realized and which remained photographed in his memory were these: "I have kept your servant waiting."—"I cannot adequately express my thanks to you for your remarkable promptitude."—" By far the ablest document I have ever had submitted to me."—"In the course of a few days an important proposition to make to you." The words affected him like a current of hot water suddenly felt by a man in a bath which is almost freezing. They did not lessen his unhappiness, but they brought into his mind a companion to it, in the shape of an unexpected excitement. With more animation

than he had shown throughout the meal he turned to Countess Shimna, and said: "Will you come out by-and-by and see what the place looks like on a day like this?"

The weather had not cleared. The windows were blurred with rain, and a westerly gale was making their woodwork rattle. Mrs. Pole protested against this proposal; but Countess Shimna leaped at it. "I can stand a storm at sea," she said. "I am not afraid of being injured by one on land."

She and Pole accordingly arranged a meeting in the hall; and at the hour appointed they sallied forth together.

They had gone, however, but a few yards from the house, when a voice arrested them quaveringly calling to him from the doorway; and they saw the old footman, standing there with a telegram. Pole's first hope had been that its signature would be "Pansy Masters"; and for a moment his heart was in his mouth and all its injuries were forgiven. But it turned out to be something that had been sent to his mother. She had answered it already; and had merely desired that it should be shown to him. "That will keep," he said, as he put it into the pocket of his macintosh; and he and Countess Shimna

resumed their walk vigorously. The wild air which blew the wet into their faces was congenial to the mood of both of them, and made them laugh as it flapped the folds of their waterproofs, and sometimes nearly brought them to a stand-still. The drifting mist made all the objects near them grey and dim as if seen through a white crêpe veil; but overhead its texture was more dense, and the woods behind the house, distinct to a certain elevation, were gradually absorbed and lost in heights of impenetrable cloud. All creation indeed appeared to Pole and his companion to be blotted out of existence, except the objects which immediately surrounded them, and even these had the aspects of phantoms fashioned out of some wizard vapour. None of the servants were abroad, not a stray groom or gardener; and the two pedestrians felt as if they were alone in a phantom world.

Their wanderings first took them along the wooded and winding pathway, on which Pole had received the financial confidences of Dr. Clitheroe. The air was wild with whispers of shivering brush-wood; birch trees swayed their boughs with a glimmer of restless silver; clusters of ash berries tossed and rocked their scarlet; and a wave below at intervals bloomed like a beaten drum. Parts of the path were so steep and slippery that Countess Shimna had frequently to lean on Pole's arm for support. At first whenever the need for his help was over, she at once withdrew her hand, and proceeded with an emphatic independence; but at length it so happened that after an exceptionally difficult scramble, at the end of which they paused to look down at the sea, she forgot to free herself as promptly as she had done hitherto. Then instinctively he drew her more closely to his side; and for a time which they did not reckon she remained there with her weight leaning on him. They might both have forgotten this seemingly trivial accident, if it had not been that from that moment, though they spoke no more than before, a new intimacy had crept into their words, and even more into their silence.

"I wish," she said by-and-by, "we could get nearer to the waves."

He told her there was a stretch of shingle not far from the landing stage, with rocks and caverns where the sea would probably be at its fiercest.

"Let us go there," she said; and they began to retrace their steps. A cry of delight broke from her when they diverged into a narrow fissure, through which by some rude steps the shingle of which he had spoken was to be reached. Not without difficulty, though helped by his firm hand, she descended slowly in the teeth of the sweeping wind; and now at her very feet were the waters with their foam and their endless vociferation. Smells of sea-weed were blown hither and thither. Pebbles screamed and rattled, drawn down by the surf, till they reached the shadows that hollowed themselves under the arch of the mounting breakers. Presently a puff of spray wetted her from head to foot.

"This is much too rough," Pole said to her. "You had better come away."

But she answered him with a laugh. "It is delicious. It drowns thought." Her mood communicated itself to him.

"If you are content," he said, "I am. Over there, there is a cave, which the tide never reaches. It will give us a wider view."

With his assistance she climbed up a ridge of rocks, which formed a wet promontory in

the sliding and frothing water; and here was a shallow recess in the perpendicular cliff. It was just wide enough for Pole and Countess Shimna to stand in, and sheltered them a little from the deafening tumult of the wind. With the Jull which he thus experienced there came back into his mind the memory of the woman's letter, by which all his feelings had been outraged; and at the same moment he turned his eyes from the sea, and let them rest on the face so close beside him, on the hair whose crisp curls the storm had hardly ruffled, and the cheeks whose delicate surface the rain and brine had affected only by rouging them with a new carnation. Presently he said to her, "Let us see what is in that telegram. Till now I had quite forgotten it." He put his hand into his pocket; and she, responding to his invitation, turned towards him and moved a trifle nearer. But just at this moment through a crevice in the rocks in front of them there rushed into the air a volume of leaping water, which caught by the wind fell splashing heavily at their feet. They both shrank back; and with a movement entirely unpremeditated, he seized her arm, and drew her close to himself. As he

did so he felt her cling to him; and the curve of the narrow cave compelled her to incline her head till it was almost resting on his shoulder. The action of the one was as involuntary as that of the other; and some moments passed before they realized how they were standing linked together. But time for reflection came; and neither of them spoke or stirred, except that he held her with a firmer pressure to his side, and little by little her weight more frankly leaned on him. The solitude and the storm spoke for them and freed their silence from embarrassment, as if it were an anthem or oratorio which rendered speech impossible; and their eyes found rest in watching the tumult of the incalculable waters, whose wanness the dark cave framed like an oval picture.

At last she said, "Are you going to show me the telegram?" There was in the words a tone which gave them the quality of a caress; whilst at the same time their commonplace meaning relieved the situation of its tension, without breaking its spell.

"Here it is," he answered; "help me to hold it, and we will read." The message ran thus: "Expect me to tea. Board and lodge

me for night. Am bringing news of utmost moment to your son." These words merely bewildered Pole, till with some trouble he deciphered the name and address of the sender, which a drop of water had rendered hardly legible. The name was "Wargrave," and the address seemed to be "Dulverton." Lord Henderson's letter again shone out in his memory. It and this telegram must plainly have some connection. What was in store for him? He drew a deep breath as he asked himself, and a flock of wild ambitions rose suddenly out of his heart, and mixing themselves with his consciousness of the storm, went floating over the foam like sea-gulls. The girl's look of inquiry, and the curve of her parted lips, added to the ferment of his mind. "I never showed you," he said, "the letter I received at luncheon. I have been doing work for the Government, and they now want something more of me. I can't think what. I suppose I shall know soon." With that quickness of sympathy which was one of her great charms, she caught his excitement, and it began to sparkle in her eyes.

"What is the time?" she exclaimed. "See, it is nearly five; we must not stay a moment

longer. It is very late as it is. And yet, after this I feel that the house will stifle me."

"Give me your hand," he said, as they moved forth from their shelter, and their waterproofs once again were caught by the sweeping wind. "My dear," he exclaimed, "be careful," as her footing almost failed her. "Rest there till I find a firm place to stand on. Now, if you're not afraid, put your hands on my shoulders." And she, committing herself to his arms, was lifted down by him to the shingle. The beach before them was white with a multitude of climbing fleeces. The tide had risen, and all but licked their feet. But for some time they remained where they were, stationary, she still clinging to him, though all need for his support was over, as if both were reluctant to go back to the world and quit the magic solitude which had drawn them thus together. There had been a spell for both of them in the noise of the winds and waters. It had drowned so many voices in them which would soon again be audible; and they still lingered, as if they were mesmerized by their sensations, watching the waves which arched themselves like the

necks of Clydesdale horses and fell clothed with thunder.

When they re-entered the house the first object their eyes fell upon was a man's great coat, a dirty-looking knitted comforter, an open paper packet with a half-eaten sandwich in it, and a hat with a discoloured lining, which Pole recognized as Lord Wargrave's.

CHAPTER IV.

"HERE he comes; here is the saviour of society." Such was the greeting that fell upon Pole's ear as soon as, having changed his clothes, he made his appearance in the library. The words would perhaps have been even more impressive than they were, had Lord Wargrave's mouth when he spoke thus been a little less full of muffin. With an effort he rose from the cushions amongst which his form had entrenched itself, resting his hand, during the process, on Mrs. Pole's shoulder, partly as a token of his affectionate esteem for her, and partly as a means of assisting his own movements. "How are you, my dear Reginald?" he continued, extending both his hands, and gradually dragging Pole with him back to the cups and "Sit down there," he said. muffins. subsiding into his former seat, and pointing out a chair to his host which was Spartan in

its simplicity and hardness. "I hear you've been out bathing, and in very agreeable company."

"I'm glad," said Mrs. Pole, "that Shimna seems none the worse for her wetting. I'll take her up a cup of tea, and leave you two to talk together."

"Here," grunted Lord Wargrave, giving a push to the muffin dish, "take these also, Augusta, if you don't mean to ruin my dinner. My dear Reginald," he resumed, as soon as Mrs. Pole was gone, "if you're at all the man I take you for, I have every reason to congratulate you. I have been at Dulverton the whole of this past week. I have read your reports, and entirely agree with Lord Henderson about them. You're the first person who has accurately mastered these subjects, and has kept meanwhile a cool head on your shoulders. Most of our modern politicians who busy themselves with the question of poverty are as useless as a surgeon who sobs when performing an operation, and cuts an artery because his tears prevent his seeing it."

"I fear," said Pole, "that their blindness is a good deal more genuine than their tears."

"I was not referring," said Lord Wargrave, "to our ultra-radical revolutionaries, who will probably, this autumn session, seriously embarrass the Government. am," he muttered, "a democrat in many ways myself; but these men show us the weak spot in democracy. The distress of the poor, in times of industrial depression, is not only the most important of all political problems, but incalculably the most complicated; but it is unfortunately a problem for dealing with which in a popular way, ignorance, incompetence, and vanity are literally the first qualifications. Well, the fact of the matter is this, though these men in the House of Commons have no knowledge themselves, it requires a good deal of accurate knowledge to answer them. present they are answered by nobody; they are only outvoted; and nobody but a fooland there are many fools-will confuse the two operations. Now what the Government wants is some one who has facts at his fingers' ends, and who knows how to use them as arms of precision against an opponent. When neither party knows facts, the party wins which invents them; and the present Government, for a wonder, would

prefer to win by knowing. Well," continued Lord Wargrave, "the long and short of it is," and he brought down his hand on Pole's knee as he spoke, "the long and short of it is that there is a strong impression at headquarters—the Prime Minister feels quite as strongly about it as Lord Henderson—that the man who can best supply what the Government is in want of is yourself. There is, in short, a serious anxiety to have you in the House of Commons."

Pole listened with grave attention, but without much animation.

"I was once asked," he said, when Lord Wargrave paused, "to contest one of the divisions of Devonport. I was not, at that time, in a position to do this; but, had I done it, I should have been beaten by a thousand votes."

"It is not proposed," said Lord Wargrave, "to ask you to stand against anybody. Sir John Markham, the Under-Secretary for ——, as you probably know, is going to resign his seat. He sits for the Windsor Boroughs—a constituency in which there has been no contest for twenty years, nor will there be one when he resigns. The idea is that you should take Sir John's place, and succeed

him—I assure you this is meant in all seriousness—not in his seat only, but in his office.
I tell you," said Lord Wargrave, who sat on
the cross benches, "I tell you, my dear
Reginald, that it is more than eighty years
since the Tories have shown such a quick
appreciation of talent; and if you are only as
remarkable for having deserved such rapid
promotion, as you are for having received
it, you will find yourself in a month or two
the most distinguished politician of your
generation."

Pole's face had, by this time, entirely lost its apathy.

"Do you mean," he said, "that such a proposal will really be offered to my acceptance? Or is this merely some idea that had occurred to yourself and Lord Henderson in conversation?"

"Ten days ago," said Lord Wargrave, "it was no more than that; but the idea has now been suggested to the Prime Minister. I have written to him," said Lord Wargrave, with consequential solemnity. "In fact, my dear Reginald, I may say it is I who have been your godfather in the matter. The Prime Minister is an excellent man. He rarely gives good advice, but he very often

takes it; and he shares entirely Lord Henderson's views about you, and my own. I told him besides," Lord Wargrave added, "that personally you were charming, and that if he had a young wife, he ought never to ask you into his house. I need hardly inquire if you are willing to embrace fortune, though this is the very thing I have come here in this rain to do."

"Upon my word," said Pole, laughing, "I have hardly taught myself yet to believe that this is really true."

"You're too modest," said Lord Wargrave. "More men are so than most people suppose. My dear fellow, I should like you to remember this-that there is one point, and one point only, as to which the least influential man can lead the opinion of everybody—and that is his own capacity when he himself undervalues it. I'll show you, after dinner, the Prime Minister's letters. But where is our young lady? Where is the beautiful Countess? I suppose she is still drying herself, and we shall not see her till dinner. In that case," he said, rubbing his bushy evebrows, "I think I will take a nap; and the new Under-Secretary shall show me up to my bedroom."

Lord Wargrave's nap was of so charmingly sound a quality, that it trenched considerably on his usual time for dressing; but he sacrificed with a sublime indifference many minor niceties of the toilet, and when he entered the drawing-room his composure was quite unruffled by the fact that his shirt was deficient in two of its pearl buttons, and that the how of his necktie was under his left ear. He was so overflowing with a mixture of importance and universal benevolence, that he almost embraced Dr. Clitheroe, and actually kissed Miss Drake; and he looked round the room with a curious twitching of his features, as if expecting in some corner to discover the presence of Countess Shimna.

"Don't be alarmed," said Mrs. Pole.
"We have got her safe and sound for you.
I made her go to bed after her wetting, which accounts for her being a little late; and I begged her, whatever she did, to come down in high dress. Here she is."

And as Mrs. Pole spoke, Countess Shimna entered, trailing a silken tea-gown of pink and pale green, and showing as she walked the tips of her pink pointed shoes. Her eyes were shining, her cheeks had a shell-like clearness.

"Here is a Venus," exclaimed Lord Wargrave, "who has literally risen from the foam." And he hurried forward to meet her with a species of paternal gallantry.

Pole realized the impression which the girl had made; indeed there seemed to himself to be a new brilliance in her aspect. As he looked at her, he thought of the hours they had so lately passed together, and a secret sense of possession passed through him with an electric thrill.

"Is she still the same?" he asked himself with a moment's jealous doubt: but as they went in to dinner and her hand pressed itself on his arm, his pulses received an answer. What filled his heart was pain almost as much as pleasure; but in defiance of a voice within him, he deliberately gave the pleasure harbour. His thought was, "I have suffered enough. I will free myself now at any price."

Every circumstance combined to assist in his emancipation, at all events for the time being—his intoxicating sense of the prospects which had just been opened before him, and which even yet he hardly realized; the look which now and again Countess Shimna cast at him through her eyelashes, and the

animation of Lord Wargrave, who was half a dozen conversationalists in one. He talked of St. Petersburg, of Warsaw, of Florence, surprising Countess Shimna with his knowledge of them; and he described an attempt at a revolution in the streets of a northern capital, which he said he had seen extinguished by the bloodless artillery of two fire-engines. "I never," he said, "knew hydrophobia exhibited in so salutary a form." Then he told an anecdote of the dignified Dean Osborn Pole, which one of his auditors recognized as a myth that was told of many people. The Dean, said Lord Wargrave, had, in the Close at Exeter, seen a boy of exceedingly small stature, vainly endeavouring to reach the Archdeacon's bell-pull. The Dean with magnificent benevolence had lifted the boy up, who lost no time in producing a peal like thunder. "Now," said the urchin, when the Dean had put him gently down, "you run like Hell." Countess Shimna's amusement at this, fanned the fire of Lord Wargrave's memory. He asked Dr. Clitheroe if he had ever known certain bishops; and proceeded to sacrifice them, hardly waiting for the Doctor's answer: and he then alluded to the trial of a certain fraudulent banker, which

had very lately been attracting public attention.

"And everybody," said Mrs. Pole, "thought him such a good man."

"I have a Prayer-book still," said Lord Wargrave quietly, "which he gave to my poor dear mother. When he sent her a 'Manual for Communicants,' and 'Meditations for every Day in the Week,' I made her withdraw her balance."

"I'm glad," said Mrs. Pole, "we're none of us your bankers. It seems you would have no faith in us unless we pretended to be very wicked. Have you known many swindlers that you're so quick in detecting them?"

"Intimately," answered Lord Wargrave. "I've known every variety of them. Delightful men, most of them, excepting perhaps the Socialists."

"Socialism," said Pole, "and I speak from a good deal of experience of it, is the same thing in these days that patriotism was in Dr. Johnson's. It is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

"Serious Socialism," said Lord Wargrave, "is something much worse than that—it is the last or the first refuge of inferior or

ineffective talent. We have to thank our friend Dr. Clitheroe here for most of it."

"May I," exclaimed the Doctor, surprised at this sudden attack, "venture to ask why?"

"Because," answered Lord Wargrave, "you're one of the ablest men in the Education Office. It is quite possible to educate anybody so as to make most of the necessary work of the world intolerable to him. A socialistic leader, as a rule, is active in the cause of Socialism, in proportion to the contempt he feels for the only useful work he is fit for."

Miss Drake's mouth was rigid with amazement at Lord Wargrave's eloquence. Mrs. Pole seemed amused at him rather than concerned in what he was saying; but Countess Shimna, on the contrary, somewhat to Pole's surprise, had all the appearance of listening with real attention. At last she said to Lord Wargrave, looking at him with her heart's-ease-coloured eyes—

"Are English Socialists—you see I know so little of this country—in any way like Russian Nihilists?"

"No," said Lord Wargrave, "except that they are both dreamers. One wants to destroy what is an accident of society in Russia; the other, what is the essence of all society everywhere."

After dinner Mrs. Pole asked Countess Shimna to sing. Lord Wargrave seconded the request, but in a somewhat perfunctory manner; as music at that moment presented itself to his mind mainly as an obstacle to the flow of his own conversation. At the first notes, however, of Countess Shimna's voice he rose from his chair, with his eyes brightening under his eyebrows, and strode across the room to the piano, on which he leaned, absorbed and motionless. The song to which he listened was in Russian. The air, with a curious accompaniment, came to the ear plaintively as a kind of barbaric wailing, and the soft, unfamiliar syllables rose and fell on the notes, wild and remote, like the lapping of the Don or Volga. Wargrave's emotions were so deeply stirred that he made, when the song was ended, an audible sound in swallowing them.

"The Russians," he said, "talk every language so well they never would give me the chance of learning a word of theirs. What is that song? It's the most moving piece of music I ever listened to."

Countess Shimna looked up at him, her fingers still on the keys. "It is supposed," she said, "to be the song of Nihilists on their way to Siberia. I have two Polish friends there."

"What a pathetic song, my dear," said Mrs. Pole's voice from a distance.

Lord Wargrave and Pole were the sole auditors at the piano, and for some moments neither of them made any answer. At last Pole said, "See what a lovely night!" Countess Shimna and Lord Wargrave both of them turned their eyes to the window. The curtains were but half-drawn, and they saw, through the glass and between the fringes, the tossing of troubled silver on a sea under silver clouds, and the full moon shining in an estuary of clear sky. Pole opened one of the casements. The air was moist and warm, and the sound of the waves, still unquiet on the beach, came rustling up to them through the foliage. The three went out, and stood on a broad stone step, which, despite the recent rain, was now perfectly dry. Lord Wargrave, under the combined influence of the song, the singer, and the stars, was a totally different man from what he had been at dinner.

"I once knew," he said, turning to Countess Shimna, "a young Polish Nihilist myself. He was noble, rich, accomplished; and had eyes as dark and wild as a forest on a stormy night. I have always thought of him as the last of the cavaliers. That's a type of man that can never be produced by Socialism. The aspirations of the Nihilist are impracticable; those of the Socialist are unreal."

"But surely," said Countess Shimna, with a ring of feeling in her voice, "some of your Socialists have had their sincere enthusiasms."

"I call Socialism unreal, as a creed," said Lord Wargrave, "for this reason. It demands what is not only impossible, but what every human heart knows and feels to be impossible—that men should seek the welfare of others exactly as they seek their own. If our sympathies were really so keen as to enable us to do that, instead of all being happy, no human being would be ever happy again. One mother's bereavement would break the hearts of all of us. One case of cancer would madden us all with pain."

"And yet," said Countess Shimna, looking out towards the sea, and seeming to speak to herself rather than Lord Wargrave, "people do perform this impossibility for the sake of their children daily."

"True," muttered Lord Wargrave. "But the Socialism of the family is the only Socialism practicable; and this is the very thing that all other Socialism would destroy. My dear young lady," he exclaimed, speaking to her in a tone which compelled her to look at him, "a man who tells you he loves a stranger as much as his own son, really loves his son as little as he loves a stranger. You speak of children. Wait till you are yourself a mother. No woman has any love for the children of others, if she has not a love, which is immeasurably greater, for her own child. In fact," said Lord Wargrave, clearing his throat impatiently, so as to rise from the tone of emotion to that of calm philosophy, "we, none of us, care for anything pertaining to our neighbours unless we first care more for a similar thing pertaining to ourselves. The only exception," he added, digging Pole with his elbow, and sinking his voice to a sort of grunting whisper—"the only exception is supplied by the case of wives." The grimace which accompanied this speech presently died away, and his face resumed its gravity. "The most moving

thing"—he went on again, changing his tone, and drawing Pole a little aside—"the most moving thing in the whole world is the clinging of a mother to her illegitimate child. She not only does everything for it, but she braves everything." Countess Shimna meanwhile had been altogether unconscious of this by-play. She had apparently even forgotten the very presence of her two companions. Her face was turned away from them, her eyes were wide and shining; and Pole saw, or thought he saw, the outlines of her moonlit throat troubled, as if by an effort to master some strong emotion.

At this moment the slight puff of a breeze caused Lord Wargrave to look down at his shirt front. He saw that the sole button which the energies of his laundress had left to it, had slipt from its frayed buttonhole, and was permitting the breath of night to visit his person with an undesirable intimacy. "Come," he said to Countess Shimna, taking her without the least ceremony by the arm, "it's getting cold. You ought to stay out no longer." And partly pushed by his touch, partly moving to escape from it, she was with surprising rapidity shepherded back by him into the drawing-room.

What could be the meaning, Pole asked himself, of the sudden emotion which appeared a moment ago to have overwhelmed her? Was she thinking of the Siberian exiles? Had one of these been her lover? On what strange voyage had her thoughts and her feelings gone? As he said good night to her, her eyes were liquid and shining—so it seemed to him—with sadness rather than passion. And yet the slender hand which had clung to him that afternoon still left its pressure lingering and tingling on his arm.

He was not, however, permitted to dwell upon these sensations; for no sooner had the three ladies retired, than Lord Wargrave made preparations, with which all his friends were familiar, for sitting up and talking till two o'clock in the morning. "Send my servant," he grunted to the old butler.

"He's here, my lord," replied Martin; and in response to a whispered summons, a valet entered bearing a dirty quilted dressinggown.

"I have here," said Lord Wargrave as soon as he was invested with this garment, "all those letters of which I spoke to you. I put them in these pockets before dinner, in

order that I might show them to you now." He advanced as he spoke towards a tray, which gleamed with bottles and tumblers, and mixed himself a glass of strong brandy and soda-water. Provided with this, he at once went to business, and explained to Pole, with the aid of various documents, the exact position of affairs. "Sir John Markham's retirement," he said, "will not take place, till just in time to admit of your being elected before the Autumn Session. There will therefore be no necessity for you to move in the matter for the present. You will before long be approached from the proper quarter; and meanwhile leave the whole thing to me. By the way, your mother tells me you are making some experiments here. That is all in your favour; and I shall not forget to mention them, especially as we shall have you in your office before they have time to fail. You must tell me to-morrow what it is you contemplate. And now," he said, "let us talk about this lovely Austrian Countess. She's quite the most fascinating woman I ever met-I mean," he added with gravity, "outside the demi-monde. She has every charm about her. She's jeune fille - she's married woman - she's Magdalen - she's

Madonna—she's conspirator—all by turns—all together—all made up of music and Dresden China. And her dress too—delightful! I have seen nothing like it since the last days of the Tuileries. She made even Socialism interesting by the way in which she listened to what I said about it. You know who she is, don't you?"

"How do you mean?" asked Pole.

Lord Wargrave rubbed his chin, and shot out his under-lip. "I've not," he said, "the least doubt in my mind about it. I've been thinking the matter over since we paid our visit on board the yacht. Her grandmother was the daughter of Lady Thyrza Brauncepeth by that most remarkable man—that genius manqué—your great-uncle. She died in childbirth and had a daughter who lived. I know the convent in which the child was educated. The Mother Abbess was a daughter of an Archbishop of Paris."

"You are right," said Pole, "about Countess Shimna. She told me the same thing herself."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Lord Wargrave. "You don't say so! Did you ever hear this?" he added, and he muttered forth the following verse:—

""Those myrtle-blooms of starriest birth
Were dim beside her breast of snow;
And now it sleeps beneath the earth
From which their sister blossoms blow."

They're Byron's lines," he continued, "written on Lady Thyrza's death. I was quoting them the other day to that male vestal of yours, Canon Bulman. And so, the young lady knows the story herself, does she? I should like to talk to her about her distinguished ancestor and ancestress."

"I dare say," said Pole, "she would not have any objection."

"Objection!" said Lord Wargrave. "Objection to the subject! She knows far too much of the world not to be fascinated by it. By the way, I have upstairs a copy which D'Orsay gave me of a poem by your greatuncle. I thought you might like to see it. I will read it to-morrow to you both."

CHAPTER V.

LORD WARGRAVE had told Mrs. Pole that his visit would be for one night only; but the charms of Countess Shimna, the romance of her parentage, and her evident appreciation of himself, so wrought on his mind that he announced his intention next morning of remaining another day, "in order," he said to Mrs. Pole, "to see the site of Reginald's buildings. And then," he added, "when I return to Dulverton, I'll take you over with me to lunch. We've shown Countess Shimna an English statesman already. We mustn't let her go without showing her an English duke."

When the visit to the site had been accomplished, and when Pole had retired to his work, Lord Wargrave had Countess Shimna all to himself till luncheon, and approached with complete success the delicate subject of her ancestry.

"I promised her," he said to Pole, as after luncheon they were smoking in the garden, "that if she would come to us here I would read that poem I was speaking about. I told her she was descended from the most remarkable romance of the century. An illegitimate birth celebrated by Byron is better than a legitimate one consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury."

He sat himself down on a bench and looked slowly round him. Before him was a verbena bed, and rose-bushes were on each side of him.

"Beautiful," he muttered, "this place is! Beautiful! You know, Reginald, that celebrated saying of Kant's—the only saying the world at large knows him by—that he was filled with awe by two things—the stars, and man's sense of duty. Had his eyes been sharpened by life as well as by philosophy, he would have mentioned three things, not two, and three totally different ones."

"And what," asked Pole, "would they have been?"

"A flower," said Lord Wargrave, sententiously, emitting a puff of smoke, "a woman in love, and a woman praying. They are all expressive of precisely the

same mystery—the universe breaking into life. A flower is earth's kiss to her human children, who have drawn a conscious life from her; a woman's kiss is the longing of that life to renew and to complete itself; a woman's prayer is the longing that the completion may endure for ever. Kant talked about stars. Words-words-words. Why did he take the trouble to go so far? The earth is a star to the people who live in Jupiter, and it is the only star which for us is more than a huge teetotum. For us it is the one mouth of the universe. It talks to us, and we are ourselves its language. Nobody, my dear Reginald," he continued, shifting his position a little, "has more affection for the moon than I have. But why do you and I consider the moon beautiful? Merely for the sake of the lovers who have whispered amongst her lights and shadows."

Lord Wargrave, when he had risen for a moment into the region of sentiment, generally felt it incumbent on himself to descend somewhat heavily to earth, as if to show the weight of the wisdom that could be thus lifted at will.

"The ancients," he now began, adjusting

his voice afresh, "were perfectly right in making the god of elemental passion the god of gardens. The idea had nothing gross in it. It was no insult to the gardens. It was merely a beautiful expression—beautiful as the garlands which were offered him-of the true character of the god. Protestant theology-" But Lord Wargrave sharply checked himself. "Hush!" he exclaimed, "don't move for a moment. She has not seen us yet. Did Greuze or Watteau ever paint anything daintier? You ought to give her a lamb, which she might lead with a blue silk ribbon, and a shepherdess's crook set with diamonds. She has everything that the artificial world could give her except artificiality."

Countess Shimna, who had been advancing slowly along the walk, now caught sight of them, and they both rose to meet her. Pole looked at her with eyes sharpened by Lord Wargrave's criticism; and her appearance, he thought, certainly justified it. No English girl would in the country have dressed as she did; and an English girl, so dressed, would, in the country, have appeared constrained and vulgar. But every movement of Countess Shimna's was grace and nature

itself; and her face, in the rose-coloured twilight formed by a pink parasol, seemed to him like a mirror which, though set in a jewelled frame, was filled with the reflections of the naked realities of life.

"I was," said Lord Wargrave to her, as they strolled towards one of the summerhouses, "on the point of observing to our friend here, how much better your Church understands human life than ours does. Protestant theology, as I was just going to tell him, quite in opposition to the Catholic, regards soul and body as if they were oil and vinegar; the oil being specially manufactured for burning in the Protestant hell, the vinegar for giving its character to the genuine Protestant heaven. The true connection of the two is altogether different. Life is the flame of a lamp; and the body, with all its senses, is the wick by means of which the mysterious spirit burns. Do you understand that?" he muttered, peering at Countess Shimna.

"Who would not?" she answered, with a sort of pensive emphasis, which for some reason or other came as a shock to Pole. She spoke at times as if life were all behind her; and yet she looked as if it was all to come.

"Now," said Lord Wargrave, seating himself, "now for the verses of your ancestor. There's a curious thing about him, which few people ever knew. He was supposed to be a man of the most reckless and lawless tastes. No idea could be falser. He really had the same poetic passion for constructing a home that Byron had for breaking loose from one. Indeed, his imagination surrounded the legitimate satisfaction of the affections with all the charms which poets usually attribute to the illegitimate. Inexperience," muttered Lord Wargrave, parenthetically, "is probably the explanation in both cases. Well, listen to this now. It is quite evident from its date, as well as everything else, that it was written to Lady Thyrza before they eloped, and whilst she must have been still hesitating.

"What gift shall I give you? Suppose, if you please,

I had houses, and acres, and fashion and fame, And a name. Need I tell you, my friend, that of these

I could give you not one, dear, not even my name.

"But a something I must give—a something with qualities

To prove you and move you. So since, as I said,

- I can't give you things that the world calls realities,
 - Let me bring you my hopes. Will you take them instead?
- "They are excellent hopes. I can speak, for I know them.
 - I have fed them and nursed them, through good and through ill;
 - And they in return-you can't think what I owe them,
 - For when all things had left me they clung to me still.
- "When the days and the nights became drearier and colder,
 - When I slept with a sigh, or awoke with a moan,
 - They were by me to breathe with their cheeks on my shoulder,
 - 'Take courage, you shall not be always alone.'
- "How simply they spoke! But they cheered my dejection;
 - For they hinted of one who should come through the gloom,
 - To the hearth of my life with the fire of affection, And should turn to a chamber what else were a tomb.
- "How simply they spoke! And yet all that was tragic,
 - Took flight at their touch, and receded from life;
 - For they sang a redemption, a passion and a magic
 - Into words like a hearth, and a home and a wife:

"Till what seemed to the boy like the vain iteration

Of copy-book platitudes bought by the quire, Was flamed on the man like a new revelation Of the glory of God in a scripture of fire.

"Yes—that's what my hopes did. Despair and complaining

They turned into patience; and day after day, When my dark mood returned like the clouds after raining,

They were by me, to cheer me and chase them away.

"Will you take them—my hopes, then—my gift that I'm bringing?

But before you accept them, there's this to be said,

'Tis merely that now they have done with their singing,

They are silent; I've killed them. I bring you my dead.

"Nay, turn not away in disgust from their faces;

Look at least at them once, and I think you
will see

That for you, dear, my mute ones still speak from their places,

And you'll hear them, and murmur, 'He killed these for me.'"

If Lord Wargrave had wished to create an impression by his reading, he succeeded, but not on the person in whose special honour he had exerted himself; and the effect being

unexpected, he altogether failed to observe it. Countess Shimna indeed thanked him with expressions of appreciation and interest; but the one listener who had really been moved was Pole. "If I could write verses," he was saying to himself, "this, and this, and this, is what I myself should have written." And his thoughts for the time being were with a woman who was far away. happened, however, that just as the reading was concluded, he caught Countess Shimna's eyes. She seemed, as she looked at him, to be penetrating into his very soul; and her lips, half parted, and half pouting, seemed to send her sympathy to him, charged with remembered passion. His cheeks grew hot —he knew not for what reason; and like a relapsing wave his thoughts came refluent back to her.

"That girl," said Lord Wargrave to Pole, when by-and-by they were alone together, "is a remarkable instance of what we now call heredity. Her own character is exactly like her great-grandfather's verses. I can see it in her. These verses have that delightful and convenient quality of dressing up as a virtue what the vulgar would call vicious. In this case, as it happens,

Tristram Pole was right. He and his Thyrza have my profoundest sympathy. But what he did in this case, our young lady would do in every case. She is quite incapable of doing what she thinks wrong; because she never would think wrong anything she might want to do. Before she had tried to judge it, she would have tied it up into a nosegay. If she wished to commit a murder, she would arrange the act to look like self-immolation."

This hasty criticism did not exactly please Pole.

"Do you, then," he said rather dryly, believe in the theory of heredity?"

"I have," said Lord Wargrave, "believed with so much enthusiasm in every false theory that has shocked the world since I was twenty, that I often wonder why I have not been taken in by this one. There's something in it—not much. Think for a moment. You have sixteen great-great-grandparents. In producing you they are just like sixteen paint-brushes, each of which has been dipped in a different colour; and all have been washed together in one tumbler of water. Will the pink brush or the blue make the water blue or carmine?"

"It might," said Pole, "if the carmine or the blue were strong, and the other colours weak."

"My own theory precisely," said Lord Wargrave. "I believe that the race is saved by the intensity of its illegitimate unions. A couple like Thyrza and Tristram might transmit their colours for generations. I'm devoted to my own theories; but nothing surprises me so much as some fact, like Countess Shimna's character, which suggests that they may be really true."

At dinner Lord Wargrave handed Mrs. Pole a telegram. It consisted of six words: "The Duchess will be delighted. Dulverton."

"I wrote to him," said Lord Wargrave, "last night, to say we would come to luncheon. I find we must leave this at half-past ten in the morning."

Mrs. Pole looked at him with a smile in which startled amusement just got the better of annoyance.

"I never," she said, "thought that you were really serious. But you have, it seems, settled it all yourself." And the expedition was arranged accordingly.

When the morning came, however, Mrs. vol. II.

Pole announced at breakfast that she was suffering from a severe headache and could not possibly go. Lord Wargrave seized her hand, in an outburst of sympathy and disappointment.

"Not go!" he exclaimed. "My dear Augusta, you must. The two best things for a headache are fresh air and sleep. You'll get one in driving to Lyncombe; and you'll secure the other by talking to the Duchess after luncheon."

But Mrs. Pole was firm.

"Very well, then," said Lord Wargrave, "I must be Countess Shimna's chaperon. I've taken out three nieces and one daughter in London; so I think you may trust this young lady to me for an hour or two."

Pole seconded this plea; but his mother remained doubtful, till she saw that Countess Shimna's eyes were bright with a wish to go.

"Well, Shimna," she said, "you must promise to take care of Lord Wargrave, and you must begin with setting him an example of getting yourself ready this instant."

"You and Reginald," said Lord Wargrave to Mrs. Pole, when Countess Shimna had left the room, "must take a house in London this winter, and you should bring this young lady out."

"Me!" exclaimed Mrs. Pole. "I don't know twelve people there."

"I," said Lord Wargrave, "would see that she was asked everywhere. I'd take her myself to every ball that was worth going to."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pole, laughing, "and if she were not a foreigner, I've not the least doubt you'd present her."

To this repartee Lord Wargrave made no answer. He was meditating on the new social value he would himself acquire, if he could appear in London as the godfather of a new beauty. "I'll tell you what," he said, "when the autumn session begins and Reginald comes to London, you and he shall have my house in Brook Street, and your only rent shall be to bring Countess Shimna with you."

CHAPTER VI.

POLE'S impressions of his beautiful and enigmatic guest had been sharpened and multiplied by the various incidents of the day; but taken as a whole they were even less intelligible than before, and yet their mystery was becoming more and more fascinating to him. Under the sparkling surface of her girlhood, he had seen as if he had been peering into water, vague and fluctuating images of matured and almost sombre womanhood. She had shown herself possessed of an insight into life and sorrow almost as vivid as her discrimination in the literary matters of which from time to time she had engaged in discussion with Lord Wargrave. He fancied too that he detected in her opinion of George Sand and of Byron the same knowledge which had betrayed itself in that penetrating look which she had fixed on him, after the reading of Tristram Pole's verses; and Lord Wargrave's enthusiastic appreciation of her did much to intensify his own.

When they drove off next morning on their way to their lunch at Dulverton, he felt himself transported into the atmosphere of some hardly credible fairy-story, though an aching nerve in his conscience was still tethering him to his past. As he sat opposite to her in the landau, which was a Glenlynn heirloom, and saw her fresh as a flower against the old moth-eaten cushions, his imagination surrounded her with all kinds of shifting scenery. She was leaning her breast on a balcony of Italian iron-work; love-songs and the sounds of guitar-strings were rising to her from mysterious gardens; or wrapped in furs under frosty northern starlight, she was leaving a last kiss on the lips of some Polish exile. Then, through all these fancies her actual aspect would force itself on him, with the lips and the eyes that had begun to provoke and tantalize him; and then he would remember the fact-now hardly credible-that this form, which he persuaded himself had been longed for by so many others, had almost, in the foam-drenched cave, committed itself to his own arms. On the platform of the Lyncombe terminus every eye followed her. There were various ladies there of the kind common in watering-places. Countess Shimna was as conspicuous amongst them as an orchid in a bowl of buttercups; and many a feminine face turned towards the carriage which she entered, attracted by the silver braid which glimmered on her dark-blue collar.

An hour in the train brought them to the Duke's station—a cottage and a gravelled platform, close to the lodge gates. A footman, whose hat had a band of deep gold lace, but whose long maroon-coloured coat was apparently far from being of the newest, was there awaiting their arrival; and they were presently speeding through the park in a large but uncomfortable waggonette, whose springs, as Lord Wargrave explained apologetically to Countess Shimna, had been injured when the vehicle was used at one of Sir Robert Peel's elections. Lord Wargrave was now in a state of complete happiness. He felt as if he were himself the possessor of Dulverton and of the Duke also; and when soon in the Duke's presence he should resign this vicarious lordship, he looked forward to

a comforting sense of a property in the young lady he was bringing with him.

Dulverton Park was a long, low structure, whose hundred yards of stucco and square windows stretched their bilious line on a green and wooded slope, where it looked, from end to end, like a placid but emphatic protest against everything which modern taste considers as architecturally tolerable.

"What an immense château!" exclaimed Countess Shimna, as it came in view. Lord Wargrave was delighted at her wonder. "I always say," he muttered, "that this house is the most striking monument existing to the Englishman's estimate of Consols. The nation bought the property for the great Duke, and gave him a hundred and fifty thousand pounds with which to build a palace upon it. He kept the house as it was and put the money into the funds. Everything inside is exactly as he left it. That makes it interesting. Nothing could make it comfortable."

The carriage, as he spoke, drew up at the front door, and Countess Shimna was presently testing the accuracy of his description for herself. The interior of Dulverton, though more modern by thirty years than

that of Glenlynn, was in some respects like it. It produced the same sense as one entered it, of faded carpets and curtains, and constant dusting and polish applied to old mahogany. But huge equestrian portraits, which hung in the square hall, and a row of busts which stood under them on pedestals of red granite, each representing some celebrated statesman or soldier with whom the great Duke's name had been associated during the first quarter of the century, impregnated the air with all the savour of history.

"Where's his Grace?" said Lord Wargrave to a portly groom of the chambers. "I will take Countess Shimna O'Keefe and Mr. Pole to him myself." And he was preparing to push his way past several other domestics, when a short fragile-looking figure, which appeared to consist entirely of a soft wide-awake hat, an old cloak, and a pair of large smoked spectacles, became suddenly visible in a doorway, and shuffled forward towards the visitors. Lord Wargrave advanced rapidly, and meeting him half-way, caught him by the arm and injected a whisper into his ear, which all the walls and ceiling were unable to help echoing. "Here she is—our

fascinating Austrian Countess." Pole observed how the Duke, with a little irritable gesture, freed himself from Lord Wargrave's grasp, and, bestowing on him no other notice, came straight to Countess Shimna, shook her hand benignly, and said, "How do you do, my dear? I'm very glad to see you. The Duchess will be glad to see you. She's outside on the terrace. Let us go to her. Come, Reginald." He began to lead the way, but, stopping short after a pace or two, and turning round to Countess Shimna, "That picture," he said, "is my father. The bust directly under him is the great Duke of Marlborough. Are you interested in these things? You shall see all of them after luncheon." They passed out to the terrace, through a billiard-room hung with chintz, and discovered the Duchess seated, with a little dog on her knee. She had heard the party approaching, and, with such speed as was possible to her, she was duly preparing to rise from her chair to meet them; but the Duke ignoring this perfectly obvious fact, called to her from the step of the window, with his utmost pomp of utterance, "My dear," he shouted, "when you have finished your siesta, you will find me waiting here

to introduce Countess Shimna O'Keefe to you."

The Duchess was a woman mellow with the beauty of a faded tree, which still stands in November sunlit with all its leaves. She advanced wearing a smile, whose natural placid sweetness had been ruffled by the Duke's address into one of humorous resignation, and had then softened into one of conventional though gracious welcome. But when she saw Countess Shimna the conventional graciousness disappeared, and gave place to an expression in which surprise was mixed with admiration; and Pole saw that she was fascinated very much as his own mother had been, only the Duchess's manner expressed something more than his mother's had done-worldly approval in addition to instinctive friendship. He presently saw her achieve a yet more difficult conquest. Old Lady Taplow, who was so exalted a great lady that she remained an intrepid Liberal, because she never could believe in democracy, emerged from one of the windows, tremulous with years, but unbent by them. "I heard the Duke's voice," she began, "and also Lord Wargrave's. One can hear Lord Wargrave from anywhere."

And she looked at him with a malicious nod. Then she became aware that there were strangers present, and froze into silence till Countess Shimna and Pole were introduced to her. Pole she had met before, though she did not at first recognize him. "I knew," she said, "when I was young so many of your family. I can just remember that handsome but very naughty man, your greatuncle. And of course—to be sure—I saw you at your aunt's funeral." Then turning to Countess Shimna with a sort of tentative patronage, "I don't think," she said, "that I ever saw you before. If I had, I should have remembered your pretty face."

"I am sorry," said Countess Shimna, that never having been in England before, I have had no chance of being honoured by a place in your memory." The answer was made so gently and yet with such perfect aplomb that Lady Taplow was unable to show herself offended at it; but it effectually checked her preliminary note of patronage; and as, in speaking to an unknown person, she had no other at her command, she was turning away and was going to address the Duchess, when Lord Wargrave entered the lists on behalf of his beautiful protégée, and

said, "This young lady, though she speaks English so well, is Austrian."

Lady Taplow, who had heard nothing of Countess Shimna's expected coming, and who, being a trifle deaf, had not caught her name, again began feeling her way, by saying, with agreeable condescension, "I have a grandson at Vienna—Lord Taplow—perhaps you know him."

"My family," replied Countess Shimna, "never go to Vienna."

Lady Taplow on hearing this was again turning away from her, when a distant bang of the luncheon-gong caused a general movement.

"Lady Taplow," said Lord Wargrave, drawing Countess Shimna to him by her arm, "is a very interesting study. In your country she would be impossible. Her mother was the adopted daughter of the old Duchess of Southwold, but who she really was the old lady would never say. Were Lady Taplow an Austrian she could never even go to court. Her son, you know, married the heiress of a great Jewish banker."

A faint dimple showed itself on Countess Shimna's cheek, which became almost a smile when Lady Taplow, at luncheon, returned to the subject of Vienna, and spoke of the charms of its society. "I've never been there myself," she said, "but my grandson enjoys himself immensely."

"It's different," said Countess Shimna, quietly, "for a man and for a foreigner, especially if he's horsey, like your grandson."

Lady Taplow could hardly believe her own dignified ears. "My grandson," she said, "would, I think, be welcome anywhere." And she was swelling with preparations for a still further reply when Countess Shimna proceeded, "With us - with me - for instance," she said, "it would be quite different. I should always suffer from the fact that one of my great-grandparents was illegitimate." She alluded to this delicate subject with a quiet and modest self-possession, as if she were merely stating that one of her greatgrandparents wore a wig. But the effect on Lady Taplow was remarkable. Completely giving up any further attempt at patronage, she leaned forward to the Duke and said to him, "What is the name of this very goodlooking young lady?" The Duke told her, adding, "She's a cousin of Count O'Keefe, the minister."

"My dear," said Lady Taplow, "you ought

to come to London. You'd be admired from morning to night. We could show you society better even than that of Vienna."

"Lady Taplow," interposed the Duke, blinking at Countess Shimna, "can afford to ask you to London; and I'll tell you why. Both her daughters are married—married for twenty years—so you couldn't cut them out. Nobody," he added, turning round to the subject of his compliment, "nobody could cut out Lady Taplow herself."

"I'm sure," said Lady Taplow, "if she'd cut out some of our young married women, it's the very thing for which we should all feel grateful to her."

"Now," exclaimed the Duke to Countess Shimna, at the end of luncheon, "I'm going to show you the house. The Duchess will give us some coffee in the drawing-room when we come back. Wargrave knows the whole. He doesn't want to see it again." And with a rapidity surprising in one of his infirm appearance, he left the room, taking Countess Shimna with him.

"My dear," said Lady Taplow to the Duchess the moment Countess Shimna had disappeared, "she has a charming manner, this girl has: but nothing would induce me to take her out in London. She'd have too many men—married and unmarried—at her feet."

"Humph!" grunted Lord Wargrave, addressing his glass of sherry, but at the same time by an adroit jerk of his elbow inviting Pole to share his muttered wisdom, "she'd have them, if it depended on them, not at her feet only, but at her lips."

At this moment a door was partially opened, and a deep voice through the aperture ejaculated the word "Reginald." The voice was the Duke's. "Come," it continued. "Come with me. I want to have a little talk with you."

Pole rose and went. He had seen the house before, and had heard from the Duke the history of every relic and picture; but he now heard it all again with a totally new interest. The Duke was renowned for his sensitiveness to youthful beauty; so there was nothing surprising to Pole in his gallantry to Countess Shimna as a specimen of it. But what did surprise him was the extent of Countess Shimna's information as to most of the battles, the generals, and the political events, to which the Duke had occasion to allude in explaining the memorials

of his father. She understood him in a moment, questioning him with a charming animation; and Pole watched curiously how the manner of the old man changed from what at first was a mere superannuated tribute to a toy of the other sex, and brightened into the manner of a keen man of the world, conversing with a woman who was almost his equal in intelligence.

"Now," said the Duke to her, when at last he had brought her to the drawing-room, "there's the Duchess. She will give you some coffee before you go. I've got a little business to talk about with Mr. Pole."

The business, as Pole had anticipated, was connected with his political prospects. The Duke, who, though he was often amused by Lord Wargrave's company, could rarely speak of him without some furtive sarcasm, declared that in Pole's case his judgment had been singularly sound, "and for the first time in his life," said the Duke, "his whole conduct has been judicious. I've nothing to say in addition to what he has probably told you—except," he added, "and this is an important point—except that you will be justified in believing it. My dear Reginald, I congratulate you. I congratulate you on

your political prospects, but still more upon something else."

- "And what is that?" Pole asked.
- "Your prospect," said the Duke, "of driving home alone with this very charming young lady."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Pole followed Countess Shimna into the Duke's brougham, and, the door being closed on them, they drove off together to the station, he enjoyed a sense of possessing her which he had not before experienced. The way in which she had captivated her host and hostess alike, and still more the grace with which she had shown herself a match for Lady Taplow, had just been making him feel that she belonged to the world rather than to himself; and that he was but one amongst many on whom she exercised an involuntary fascination: but now when he felt her by his side, imprisoned with him between the same windows, the sense came over him that he had carried her away from everybody-that he had taken her from the world—that he had made her absolutely his own; and an inclination seized him, as she sat there, to enfold her, a captive, in his

But this inclination roused in him its own antagonist. It roused again the image of a far-off woman, by whose side he had sat in a garden with a little boy between thema woman whose eyes had then been as soft and tender, as her letters since then had been selfish and hard and heartless. All the rest of the journey the memory of her pleaded with him, and fawned on him; and his first action as soon as they reached Glenlynn was to make for the table where the letters were, which had come by the second post. mind as he did so was breathless with a hungry hope. He saw that there were three for him, and one other for Countess Shimna. He handed hers to her, and retired to a window with his own. They were all bills. Beyond the bills there was nothing for him. Two separate pangs passed through him in quick succession—the one of miserable sadness, the other of impatient anger. An hour later, when he took Countess Shimna in to dinner, he touched for a moment the hand that was resting on his arm. The hand in response clung to him a thought more closely; and he murmured to her, almost in a whisper, "I hope that you are not tired."

The night was warm—almost sultry; and after dinner, Countess Shimna, who with great good-nature had been showing Miss Drake some beautiful Venetian lace, at last moved, fanning herself towards a window that was wide open. She cast as she did so, one momentary glance at Pole. Presently he rose and followed her; and they stood by the window confronting each other.

Her face, which had been bright just now, like the sparkle of the sea at morning, changed as she found herself practically alone with him, and became like the shadowy moonlight that was actually flashing on the waves. He looked into her eyes with a long passionate interrogation. As he did so a burst of unheard music filled his mind, from instruments vague as the harps of sirens. He dropped his voice to a whisper, and said, "Shall we come outside?" She slowly nodded her head. They stepped out on to the terrace. He felt the music in the air floating and wheeling round him, hardly to be dissociated from the perfumes of the night-smelling flowers. They went to the balustrade before them, and looked out together over the sea. Below them, waves belonging to this human world, kissed and whispered amongst the rocks; but the moon-light on the far horizon was washing shadowy continents where mermaids sing, and the foam shines like diamond dust. Countess Shimna presently turned her head away, and as if with the intention of bringing herself back from dreamland, drew a deep breath of the scented garden air. In a low voice she repeated a line of Baudclaire's—

"Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir."

Then she turned to her companion and lifted her eyes to his. On one of her wrists was a bracelet he had not seen before.

"Tell me," he said, "what stones are those?" And as if to draw them nearer to him he took her unresisting hand.

"I have," she said abruptly, "something that I want to tell you."

He glanced round as she spoke towards the dining-room window, which was sending straight towards them a narrow oblong of lamplight; and he said to her, "Let us walk a little; or else we shall probably have Dr. Clitheroe joining us. Can't you see him there, pretending to be interested in those book-shelves?"

"Come," she responded quickly. She had

glided out of the light already; and they left the balustraded terrace for a walk which was hidden from the windows, and wound in silvery curves between rose-bushes and clumps of evergreens.

"Well," he said presently, using her Christian name for the first time, "and what is it you are going to tell me, Shimna?"

"I had," she said, "a letter this evening—a letter I have been expecting every day."

Pole sought her face with a look of perplexed inquiry; and his heart startled him with a throb of formless jealousy.

"The letter," she said, "is not much in itself. It merely tells me about the arrival of two of our foreign servants; but it is connected with something more. It is connected—how shall I put it?—with a certain happiness that is coming to me."

The jealousy that was just now formless, took shape and stung him. He shrank a little away from her, and said in a constrained voice, "May I venture to ask what kind of happiness it is?"

He saw her in fancy claimed by some coming lover; he saw her face lifting itself to receive this lover's kisses; he watched her lips as if they were being thus deflowered before his eyes.

She seemed to divine something of his mood and of his suspicions; for she looked at him with a smile, and said, "I can at least tell you this. It is no kind of happiness of which you can possibly be now thinking. I shall tell you about it some day. Perhaps when you know it, you may not like me the worse for it. But I wish—I don't know why—to breathe in your ear this—I am not what you think I am."

These last words were spoken slowly, and in a very low tone; and yet there was in lingering utterance a sort of caressing hardihood.

They had paused in their walk. She had disengaged her arm from his; and she now stood before him, pressing to her lips the sticks of her folded fan, the carved mother-of-pearl glimmering in the moonlight as she did so; whilst her eyes challenged his answer. In spite of what she had told him, and in spite of the fact that he believed it, the air seemed electric round him with the presence of some unseen lover. He advanced a step nearer to her hand. Her eyes, her lips, her breast, were drawing close to his

own. A determination filled him to take that conjectured rival's place, and drive him, if a reality, out of her remembrance, or, if a mere phantom, out of his own. The situation produced an effect on him which he had not himself anticipated. Without his being aware of it, his natural reserve gave way.

"Shimna," he exclaimed, "I am lonely—I am deserted and miserable. Come to my breast, and make it forget its aching. Touch me with your lips, and make me forget memory."

The words had been hardly spoken, before, so far as her own power went, both prayers had been granted by her, but with one last reservation. She suffered herself to lean on him, as a flower might lean on trelliswork, with an unabashed gentleness. She lifted her face to his, as it bent down towards her; but between his cheek and hers she quietly interposed her fan, keeping his actual touch from her with the pressure of its cool surface. "I know you are unhappy," she whispered. "Do you think I should make you happier?" He had in his nature a mixture of pride and chivalry, which made him respectful of a woman's least reluctance; and he made no attempt to break

down the fragile barrier she had placed between them; but her breath as she spoke touched him, though her lips remained virginal. All the world went mad in his brain, his nerves, his fancy; and he felt as if he were holding in his arms, music, moonlight, and perfume.

He turned that night to the picture of a very different woman, which memory had painted on his mind more than four years ago, and whose tender and living colours it had renewed day by day; and he realized that over this, like a cataract spreading over the eye, a film had spread itself bearing another picture. For the first time, next morning, he was conscious, when his letters were brought to him, of a feeling of relief that there was none in a certain well-known hand.

That morning, contrary to her usual custom, Countess Shimna appeared at breakfast.

"How well you are looking," said Mrs. Pole. "Your expedition of yesterday must have agreed with you."

The compliment was not unmerited. In certain women, a certain stir of the emotions gives to their complexion a clear and delicate

vitality, which never results to it from mere bodily health; and Countess Shimna was an example of this fact now. The tint of her cheeks made her eyes seem darker and more bright than usual, and her lips redder; and she had more than ever the air of being complete mistress of herself.

Pole was, perhaps, a little surprised at this. Men often are surprised at the aplomb evinced by women under circumstances such as these. They forget that some women are then in their natural element. But an announcement, which Countess Shimna made presently, surprised him a great deal more.

"Dear Mrs. Pole," she said, "I have just received a letter which makes me fear I must go back to-day to Lyncombe. There are two foreign servants whom my mother wishes to leave with me; and I hear they are to arrive to-day. Poor things, they are women, and speak hardly a word of English. I should like to be in the house when they arrive."

"I wish," said Mrs. Pole, "I could come into Lyncombe with you; but I am still a little unwell, and the jolting of a carriage is fatal to me."

Countess Shimna looked at Pole. "Never mind," he said quietly. "I will go with her. I want to see the builder about a slight alteration in the plans."

He reflected that at any rate he would, during the drive, be alone with her; and he wondered all the morning, which she spent in his mother's company, how this new drama would develop itself in the afternoon. He found, however, that he had been reckoning without his host—or, in plainer language, without Countess Shimna's maid, who occupied, in company of a dressing-bag, the back seat of the carriage; and who, understanding life as well as she understood hair-dressing, prevented the interchange in her presence of any but the commonest observations. But Pole's consciousness of the literal facts of the situation, was coloured by his imagination, which from time to time bewitched them, turning the English sea into the Mediterranean, the gorse and heather into groves of lemons and oranges, and himself and his companion into a pair of married lovers, borne on their bridal journey along the Cornice Road: nor had these fancies quitted him when the carriage stopped at the builder's.

"I," said Countess Shimna to him, "shall be busy till half-past five; but if, after that, you have time for a cup of tea, no doubt I could then give you one."

"If I don't come," he answered, "you will know that I have been kept too long here, and have been obliged to drive home straight."

His fear on this last score proved to be quite groundless. His business was soon settled, and he was once again in the street, with half an hour intervening between him and his promised tea—a sober refreshment which at that moment meant for him the mystery of the lips which had been withheld, but only just withheld, from him. What allurement, he thought, could be comparable to that last refusal? Would this blank half-hour, he wondered, ever draw to an end?

On the side of the wooded hill below Countess Shimna's cottage were some paths open to the public; and to while away the time he betook himself to one of them, where, lighting a cigar, he sat down on a bench. He now recollected that just as he was starting in the carriage the second post had arrived, and that his pockets were full of business-letters. He pulled them out, and began to examine

their directions. But before he reached the last, his hands holding them became motion-Staring up at him from a square chocolate-coloured envelope was the penmanship for which he had so long been waiting. The blood rushed to his face, and for a moment or two his ears tingled. At last he broke the seal and drew out the letter that was within, opening the sheets gradually, as though he feared they might have contained a scorpion. Finally he summoned resolution to look at the opening words. He had hardly done so before he thrust the letter back in his pocket. But another action had intervened. He had first pressed it against his lips. The words which he had read were only four in number; but they had been these—" My own dearest Reggie." for the present were enough for him. Without some mental preparation he felt he could endure no more. Hardly master of himself, he hastened to the hotel where the carriage was, not to the house above him, and gave orders that the horses should be got ready at once. Then he wrote a line - "I cannot come to tea-I am detained," and despatched it, before he started, to Countess Shimna by a messenger.

IIO

All the world was changed for him as he went home alone. He had left Lyncombe, and was ascending the wild hill outside it, before he allowed himself to look once more at the letter. Then he read it through—" My own dearest Reggie, I am so hurt and surprised at having heard nothing from you for so long. Except when I have been travelling, and you could not write, you have always written to me till now. What does it mean? Have you quite forgotten your poor Pansy? Or are you cross with her about something? Reggie, don't be cross with me. I am trying to do my best here, but things sometimes seem so hard, and I have no one at all to help me; and as to worldly things, in some ways I feel myself as ignorant as a child. But perhaps I am partly distracted because you have stopped writing to me. If you leave me I shall be indeed alone. But don't let me be a burden on you. I would sooner never have from you a single line again than one which you wrote unwillingly, thinking it a duty, a mere irksome duty. Forget me quite before that; but, oh, do not forget me."

Once, on a former occasion, Pole had spoken to the writer of the above letter as follows:

"Since I have known you the thought of you has wrapped me round like a cloud, and all other women have been outside it, like so many bloodless shadows. They are nothing to me. I can hardly even see them clearly." The feeling which he had thus expressed, and which had of late left him, now, as he read her letter, returned to him once more. As if by magic, all the work of the past few days had been undone. Countess Shimna, indeed, remained still in his thoughts as an attractive and interesting woman; but every passionate feeling with regard to her which had developed itself under the spell of her presence, disappeared at once, like gauze when it catches fire, and left nothing behind it but the ashes of self-reproach and of regret. He feared that he might have wounded her by his conduct, and he wondered to what He was also conscious that in relation to her his own position was embarrassing. But as to any wrong he might have done to that other woman, the very idea that he had been unfaithful to her for a single moment, was completely lost in the sense that after long sorrow she was restored to him. His arms were round her; he was caressing her with a gratitude that could not be told. Her eyes looked at him from the tender evening sea; her breath came to him in the air that was sighing over the heather, stirring his faithful thoughts of her as if they themselves were heather-bells. The better to realize the incredible happiness that was possessing him, he got out of the carriage and walked the last half of the way, with the moon floating above him, a semi-transparent film, coloured like a bruised primrose-petal in the purity of the quiet sky.

He left the road for a sheep-path; and its short elastic grass brought him to a swelling eminence, which showed him for miles and miles the cliffs and promontories of the coast. Here he paused, and, seating himself on a solitary boulder, he bethought himself of his other letters. He took them out and began again to look at them. Amongst them, he saw, was one from his chief, Lord Henderson. Having reason to believe that Lord Henderson was by this time in Norway, he was surprised at finding his envelope bearing the London post-mark. The contents of the letter revealed the reason of this. "Unexpected business," said the writer, "has forced me to give up every idea of leaving England. Lord Wargrave has explained to you the

substance of the conversation we had together, and I learn with satisfaction that our suggestions, which are those of the Prime Minister also, are acceptable to yourself. I have forborne to write to you, until I knew with certainty what Sir John Markham's intentions really were. But his resignation is now an absolutely settled thing: and we may congratulate ourselves that so far as you are concerned all will be plain sailing. No one, however, knows better than you do, or knows to better purpose, how essential to success is a complete mastery of detail; and there are a number of points with which it is highly desirable that you begin to acquaint yourself at as early a date as possible. I write, therefore, to ask if you could come to London on Friday next, and arrange to stay several days, in order that we may have ample time together. I shall myself be tied to my office desk for at least a fortnight more: so your case will at all events not be so hard as mine."

This letter, in addition to the excitement which its contents caused him, was welcome to Pole for a yet more immediate reason. To-day was Wednesday. His summons to London was for Friday. The day intervening

would be necessarily filled with business; and he was accordingly relieved from the possibility of again seeing Countess Shimna, before they should have both had time to realize and reconsider relationship. To her accordingly he wrote the following simple note:—

"I had hoped, when we parted to-day, that I should see you again almost immediately; but I am called away to London by the political work of which I told you, and in which it will always be a pleasure to me to know that I have your sympathy. I shall finish my business and return by the earliest day possible. Whatever happens to us, think of me as your friend, Reginald Pole."

But there was another letter which cost him considerably more trouble—his answer to that which had caused him his new happiness, and to which no adequate answer could be well committed to note-paper.

"I can hardly," he wrote, "thank you enough for yours which I received to-day. Repeat this to yourself over and over again. You cannot repeat it half as often as I do. You ask me why I have not written. It was only because I feared my letters had ceased to interest you. But to-day it happens I

can tell you a piece of news. A letter reached me, by the post that brought me yours, from an old friend of mine, who I thought had quite forgotten me. She used to write to me constantly; and then, for some reason I never could understand, she seemed to grow tired of me, just as I thought you had done of my correspondence. I have mentioned her before to you, and I dare say you have understood the truth-I mean, that she is more to me than any other woman in the world. Well-at last, after I had thought her dead to me, a letter from her came today. I wonder if you will be able to feel with me, and rejoice with me, in the happiness—the more than happiness—I have received from those few lines. Since you care to hear from me, you shall hear again very soon, if only you will be good enough not to think me in my dotage because I can to-day write only about a little thing like this. On Friday I go to London. You know the club at which letters will always find me. Send me a line when this reaches you, if only to tell me that you understand why I can write no more now."

On Friday, when the long lights of morning were damp and yellow on the downs, he

was speeding on his way to London; and the evening found him at dinner in his almost deserted club, his ears singing with that curious and profound silence which permeates Western London during the closing days of August.

CHAPTER VIII.

POLE soon discovered that he had not come to London for nothing. There was a mass of information which, as Lord Henderson showed him, it was highly desirable that he should acquire and digest at once; and he presently surprised his chief by the way in which he pointed out to him that, voluminous as this information was, it was deficient in many particulars, and that with regard to these, he would himself undertake to supplement it.

In this way almost all his moments were occupied; and a week slipped by like a single day and night. But though he had not time for much sentimental reflection, his mind was still permeated, as it was when he left Glenlynn, by the thought of the woman who had sent such a welcome letter to him; and his renewed faith in the depth and the fidelity

of her nature was like a spiritual food to his whole inner being, making him see the world as a place that was worth working in, and nerving his will and mind to endure and to exert themselves to the utmost. His past experiences had, by means of many disappointments, taught him one useful lesson: and this was that the woman in question was a constitutionally bad correspondent. He had accordingly resolved not even to expect an answer from her till at least a week after his own letter should have reached her. It is true that, being a man, in addition to being a philosopher, he did, every morning, in spite of his resolution, inquire for his letters at his club in the hope that one from her would be amongst them; and finding none, it is quite true that he was disappointed. His disappointment, however, hitherto had been less keen than his hopes, and had not appreciably damped his spirits during the day. But now a week had passed; a second week begun; his correspondent still was silent; and anxiety began to supervene. Anxiety in a few days more developed into a wretchedness equal to anythingindeed greater than anything-which he had ever suffered in the past, and it never for a

moment left him. It did not interfere with his work; it rather made his industry the fiercer: only, sometimes when at his desk, with his official papers before him, he would drop his pen in the middle of some elaborate calculation, and murmur to himself "How little it is I ask of you! I will never disturb your life, or trespass across your path of duty. Only do not become quite dead to me. Write me some word of kindness."

The strength of his feelings, however, was equalled by one thing; and that was a haughty and almost sullen self-control in concealing them. No one who had met him at dinner during those dark and desolate days, would have judged from his conversation that his mind was otherwise than at ease. But what manner or conversation may hide, health, that enfant terrible of those who suffer deeply, will in time partially betray, although this breach of confidence will be necessarily discreetly vague: and some alteration in Pole's general appearance at last attracted the notice of his shrewd and observant chief. Lord Henderson was a man full of a homely friendliness; and this natural characteristic had been fostered by

his gratitude to a scheme of things which had resulted in the provision of so respectable a position for himself.

"I don't know," he said one evening to Pole, peering at him through his spectacles, and noticing a paleness in his cheeks, and a faint line in his forehead, "I don't know what may be your powers as a parliamentary orator: but from the very first day since we began doing work together, I have felt that you will have to speak worse than the worst speaker I ever heard, if the quickness of your reasoning powers, and your extraordinary command of facts-and I may add your industry-do not very soon bring you into the forefront of public life. But there is one thing, my dear Mr. Pole," he continued, "of which I should like to warn you. Do you know what that is? I wish this warning was very much oftener needed. It is a warning against a tendency to do too much work, and—if you won't be shocked at me too thorough work. You are growing to look unwell-run down. That's why I say this to you. Go home to bed, and be as idle as you can manage to be to-morrow; and very soon we shall both of us have earned our holidays."

Pole, when this advice was given him, had been dining tete-à-tête with Lord Henderson; and he left the house, and started to walk home, with the compliment just paid him still ringing in his ears, and the waters of his own bitterness surging up in his heart.

As his steps carried him rapidly through the clear night air, two subtle influences began mounting up to his brain-a sense of his own wretchedness, and a sense of his own powers, which last his own proud modesty had hitherto underrated; and the two together produced an effect upon him that was not unlike a certain kind of intoxication. The brilliant future promised him as the result of his own exertions, and still more the knowledge that these exertions would be really useful to his country, seemed suddenly to lift his self-respect above the levels of his private conscience, and set it high up on some broader and firmer pedestal; and then on the glow produced by this mental experience, there followed with extraordinary rapidity a feeling of vague recklessness, as though whatever he did with his own poor private life, his self-respect would no longer be jeopardized. His thoughts began to dart from one source of pleasure to another, embroidering golden patterns on the dark sackcloth of sorrow; and yet for moments this fever would come to rest, and sorrow unrelieved shadow his whole heart. Indeed, by-and-by he heard himself, as if he were another person, betraying his own condition, by muttering these well-known words—

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind, Thou art not so unkind As man's ingratitude."

By this time he was in Piccadilly, along which lay his way home. Its vista of pavement, wan in the September moonlight, was hushed and was almost vacant. Only at intervals some wandering figures blotted it. A cab rattling in the stillness from one of the side streets detained him for a moment at one of the many crossings, and he heard on resuming his walk a light step behind him. He looked round, and close to him he saw a girl—a graceful figure, dressed with studious quiet. She raised her eyes to his with a curious kind of modesty, valuable in the calling she followed, and often not destroyed by it; and as if half afraid of speaking, she

faltered a faint "Good night." Pole's first impulse was to pass on without noticing her; but her accent was refined and gentle, and involuntarily he returned her greeting. She quickened her steps, and was at once walking by his side. "And what," he thought, "has been this poor child's history? And what fate is in store for her?" His mind as he scanned her was occupied by a mournful and moody pity, and he wondered at the possibility of the drama which, for one of its principal characters, is almost certain to have a forlorn end like this. But his whole nature at the moment was in unstable equilibrium. Before he and she had walked many yards further, her modest eyes had achieved their intended victory. "What does it matter?" was what he was saying to himself now. "She will at least help me to forget, as drink helps the unhappy poor." A minute went by, during which he was quite silent; and then abruptly stopping, he said to her, "I beg your pardon, I have suddenly remembered something. I must say good-bye to you and go home. Let me give you this for walking with me when I felt lonely." And pressing into her hand the few pounds he had with him, he left her.

"Oh, thank you!" the girl exclaimed, with real gratitude in her voice. "I'm sorry he's gone," she murmured, as she resumed her hurried walk. "I liked that man. There was something in the way he had with him that was a little bit like Charley's."

Pole meanwhile was nearing his own door. "Pansy, Pansy," he said to himself, "it matters little what becomes of me; but I respect all women for your sake, and even if you really have left me I will not make myself unfit for you to call me back again." A similar thought possessed him when he woke the next morning, and he was thankful that last night's episode was a mere phantasmal memory. He was doubly thankful for this. when at last, on going to his club, he found amongst the letters handed to him the one he so long had waited for. His heart leapt at the sight of it; and he said to himself as he took it in his hand, "My dear, forgive me for having doubted you. Forgive me for all my bitterness."

The contents of the letter for which he had thus thanked the writer in anticipation, were as follows"Dear Mr. Pole,

"I have not been able to answer your note before. Some friends-neighbours, to whom it is right that I should be civil, have been staying here for a county ball; and I have hardly a moment in which I can call my soul my own. You, no doubt, are very busy also, though you don't say how. Write and tell me some day when you can find time. Your note was very kind, and I am glad that what your friend said pleased you. She must, I think, have been in very low spirits when she wrote. But don't tell me anything of that kind again, I entreat of you. My letters when they come lie about on the hall-table, with all the bills and circulars, and with the visitors' letters, and with my husband's letters; and by accident, or by design, they might be opened by any human being. Yours,

"P. Masters."

The first effect on Pole of this letter was bewilderment; and then came a feeling that he had sustained some deliberate, some unprovoked blow, the cruelty of which, when he began to reflect upon it, reduced him once more to bewilderment; and bewilderment

began now to smoulder into forlorn anger. It seemed to him that he had reached at last the dregs of the cup of misery. But though more miserable than formerly, he had become, since last night, wiser, if wisdom consists in realizing the by-ways by which we escape from pain. His mood gradually came to resemble that in which he had last night left Lord Henderson. His respect for himself as a man of action, hard-working, successful, and —as his conscience told him—disinterested, appeared once more as a licence to comport himself in other matters as he would; only the licence now was of a more liberal character. Why, he asked himself, should he not return to Countess Shimna, freed from the half-hearted scruples which had hitherto chilled his wooing of her, and seek in the chalice which her untouched lips had offered him, relief at all costs from his present disastrous wretchedness - a wretchedness from which, it appeared to him, no relief was possible, so long as he clung to the faiths and fidelities which were its foundation? The dove-like eyes, and the soft face made of rosepetals, with gentle expressions playing across its curves like cloud-shadows-the eyes and the face of the woman he had loved for years,

looked at him steadfastly for a moment; and with a shudder he turned away from them. It was now the face of a Medusa, turning his heart to stone; and then, more mysterious, more brilliant, more dainty than ever, there shone before him the image of Countess Shimna.

Whilst this sad, but yet not singular, drama was taking place within him, he had left his club, and, having strayed into the deserted park, had been wandering there aimlessly he knew not for how long. Then at last, with the same aimlessness he left it, and was just issuing from the gates at Hyde Park Corner, when he heard behind him a burst of feminine laughter, and mixed with the laughter, the exclamation, "I said it was Mr. Pole!"

He was obliged to stop and turn round, and there, with all their eyes on him, were three excited young ladies, hustled close together, and so exactly alike in their dresses, their ribbons, and their parasols, that they seemed like a single creature with three agitated heads. By the time, however, that one of them had detached herself from her two companions, he had realized that he was in the presence of the three Miss Cremers, and

that, though he could count on the fingers of one hand the days which he had spent in their company, they were greeting him with as much effusion, coupled with as much surprise, as if he had been a favourite brother, and they had stumbled on him in the middle of Africa.

"Mister Pole!" they exclaimed one after the other, with an arch and vigorous emphasis laid on the word "Mister." "Who," continued the eldest, in admiring and serious accents, "would have thought to see you in London at this time of the year? Even we," she continued—"poor little humble we—are only shopping for the day. We came up this morning from Thames Wickham, to do some commissions from Ethel; and Mrs. Steinberg —did you ever hear of such vigour?—insisted on coming too. We are now on our way to meet her at the New Piccadilly Restaurant. where we're going to lunch early—the place for luncheon. Of course you know it well. Do come there with us and see her-that is to say, Mr. Pole, if you're not too grand to walk with us."

"And on the way," said another of the sisters archly, "we'll reward you for being so good, by telling you about dear Martha."

"That," he said, laughing, "is quite an unnecessary inducement; though it alone would have been sufficient, supposing there had been no other." The company of even the Miss Cremers was at that moment a relief to him. "Well," he said, when they had started, "and what about Martha? Tell me."

"We have never," said Miss Folly, "found her so pleasant before. She has been shut up with a bilious attack for a whole week in her bedroom. The only doctor she will tolerate is Dr. Mogg, and he comes every day with a new spiritual prescription."

"No," interposed Miss Dolly; "you mean with a new spiritual meal. I'm sure her soul overeats itself, just like her vile body; and next week, if her vile body is well enough, she is going to indulge in a regular spiritual banquet. Dr. Mogg has given her a platform ticket for a meeting at Thames Wickham of your friend Canon Bulman's League."

"And what league is that?" asked Pole.

The younger Miss Cremers could give him no very precise information; but the eldest, peering up at him with the consciousness of superior knowledge, first expressed] her wonder at his really being ignorant of anything, and then told him that the league in question had only just been formed; and that its object was to inquire into the moral antecedents of every Parliamentary candidate in every constituency in the kingdom, and, should any shadow be found to rest upon the character of any one of them, to make him either disprove the charges brought against him, or retire. "Did you not see," she continued, "what one of the papers said—that the secret aim of the League must be to abolish Parliament altogether?"

By this time they were nearing the Piccadilly Restaurant; and Pole stopping said, "I must really go no further with you; but will you give my card to the head-waiter, who knows me? I am writing an order on it for my luncheon in a quarter of an hour, and then when I come, I shall be certain to see you all. I cannot go in with you now, and inflict myself uninvited on Mrs. Steinberg."

The matter was arranged accordingly; and when the quarter of an hour had expired, Pole was entering a room, which seemed, with its lace - curtained windows, and red velvet seats, to have been transported whole from Paris, like the miraculous House of Loretto. In spite of the emptiness of the streets, the Piccadilly Restaurant was crowded. In all

directions were hungry and talkative parties, whose members were eating and laughing and helping each other to champagne, and ostentatiously enjoying themselves at a minimum of ten shillings a head. They belonged for the most part to that mysterious travelling class, which seems born to disprove the assertion that, even in these mercenary days, mere wealth can secure for its possessors any resemblance to ladies or to gentlemen; and they bore the various hall-marks of the provinces, of the Continent, and of America. Pole looked about him, bewildered by this motley throng, and was advancing amongst the tribe of tables, in search of his friend the head-waiter, when he heard a commanding voice, which, although neither loud nor harsh, pushed its way to his ear through a chorus of other noises, as an experienced dowager pushes herself through a crowd at an evening party.

"Waiter," the voice said, "bring that gentleman here—here, I tell you—that gentleman in the tall hat. I think," it added to itself, "he's the only gentleman in the place."

This flattering comment was loud enough to reach Pole's ears; and his eyes had only a little way to travel before they encountered Mrs. Steinberg, in gorgeous raiment, who beckoned him to a table variegated with half the delicacies on the *carte*.

"Here's your luncheon," she exclaimed. "Dear Mr. Pole, how are you? Child," she said to Miss Cremer, "move a little that way, and make room for him. I call it most unkind and wicked, Mr. Pole, to think of sulking by yourself. Here are three young ladies who say you are too proud to eat with them. If there had been only an old woman here I could have understood you, though I shouldn't have forgiven you. I have punished you as it is, by countermanding your solitary meal; and I told the waiter that, if he served you, I wouldn't give him a penny for himself. Come, now-begin with some of this omelette au caviare. It is quite hot still, and has been only five minutes on the table."

Pole felt himself caught and absorbed in the vortex of his hostess's welcome: and seated himself and eat exactly as she directed or suggested.

"Well," she said presently, "and now tell us your news. What brings you to London?"

He explained as briefly as he could, that he

was engaged on some official work, and also mentioned the possibility of his eventually entering Parliament.

"Dear Mr. Pole," exclaimed Mrs. Steinberg, "that is really very nice for you—the very thing you are made for. I congratulate you a thousand times. Shake hands with me, if you can do so without knocking down that siphon. And poor good Lord Henderson-I hope he is wearing well. But, dear me, you must be dreadfully alone in London; for an hour each day of Lord Henderson is hardly gay society. Come down and stay with us. We'll give you a room to work in; and whenever you're wanted here, you can easily run up by train. And then, by the way, I'm expecting a great friend of yours - Lord Wargrave. He's coming to us for a day or two, because he knew he'd be so bored in town. Now," she continued, turning to the three Miss Cremers, "don't you young ladies think that we should secure our gentleman while we've got him? Ah! Mr. Pole, you see what their eyes say; so have your portmanteau packed, come down to us to-night, and stay till you find our society more tiresome than solitude."

In Mrs. Steinberg's kindness there was a

sort of conquering sincerity, which would have compelled Pole to accept her invitation, even if it had been less agreeable to him than it was. The Blue Book at which he had been working was now nearly ready for publication, a copy in advance having been sent already to *The Times*; and the work which at this moment claimed him was the final revision of the proofs—a work which he could accomplish at Thames Wickham just as well as in London. He accordingly left the four ladies, when he parted from them at the door of the restaurant, promising to be with them again that evening by dinner-time.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN he reached the house, and found himself in Miss De Souza's presence, he once more experienced a sense of profound gladness that he had not to blame himself for his conduct on the previous night; and his recent thoughts with regard to Countess Shimna, though blamable only in a very vague way, were pushed away by him with a sense of contemptuous shame, in order that he might meet frankly the regard of Miss De Souza's eyes, which for him were, if not the most beautiful, yet the noblest, he had ever known.

Mrs. Steinberg and the three Miss Cremers had arrived an hour before him. Mrs. Steinberg, as was hardly wonderful, had gone upstairs to rest herself; but the three Miss Cremers, unwearied in effusive usefulness, were all of them clustered, when Pole was ushered into the drawing-room, round a

deeply-cushioned sofa, on which Miss De Souza was lying, one of them holding her hand, another holding her scent-bottle, and a third beseeching her to have another cup of tea. They all on Pole's entrance rose like a flock of birds, first emitting a burst of welcoming laughter, and then joining in a sort of elegiac trio, and sighing, "Oh, isn't it too bad! She's knocked herself up again! She has over-walked herself taking jellies to poor old Sally; and now her back aches so she can hardly sit upright. Ethel, I call it quite wicked of you, sacrificing yourself like this."

"Mr. Pole knows," said Miss De Souza, "that I am not generally so fragile, and he won't waste his sympathies on a hardy young woman's backache. I want to forewarn him of a far greater catastrophe, and one from which he will suffer a great deal more than we shall. Now, girls, don't tell him. Let him give three guesses."

"Mrs. Blagdon is better," said Pole, "and is coming down this evening."

"Oh, no," said the Miss Cremers, "not quite so bad as that; and from that we should suffer a great deal more than you."

Pole meditated; and drawing a bow at

a venture, he said, "Dr. Mogg is coming again to dine here."

The three Miss Cremers shrieked till the glass chandelier tinkled, and blurted out "Yes, that's it," amongst gurgles of stifling laughter. At this moment the eyes of the eldest strayed to a clock on the chimney-piece, whose face was almost lost amongst bouquets of Dresden china, and exclaimed with a gasp to her sisters: "We must go and arrange the table. The gardener's ill, Mr. Pole, and we do the flowers now." Pole secretly felt myself delighted to hear they did; for a minute or two later he was sitting alone with Miss De Souza.

The room was growing dusky; but in Miss De Souza's eyes as they turned to him, there floated a light like a gleam on a slowly-flowing evening river. "And now," she began, "we can talk for half an hour in quiet." There was in her voice, as there was in her whole air and in all her movements, a subtle something which always seemed to say, "The joys and sorrows of others are so much more to me than my own." And they seemed to say this to Pole with peculiar emphasis now. "I saw," she continued, "in The Times yesterday, a short paragraph

about this Blue Book you have been preparing; and there was an allusion at the end of it to some experiments of your own at Glenlynn. Tell me all. There is no subject in the world half so interesting as those that are now engaging you."

Pole, in many respects, was a man of unusual reticence. To the woman he had loved he hardly mentioned these subjects at all; and he had mentioned them to Countess Shimna only because, when she happened to be with him, they were engaging him in obvious and unmistakable ways. But with Miss De Souza he felt it would be as hard to keep silence about them as with other women it would be to be confidential. He drew his chair closer to her, and with an eagerness like that of a boy, he began to describe the matters with which his Blue Book dealt, the appreciation which certain parts of it had already met with, and the sudden and surprising political prospects that were She could not have listened before him. with more delight and animation had all the heatitudes of life been announced to her as in readiness for herself. They hardly knew, indeed, how time was passing, till the gong for dressing began to thunder like Sinai; and silently following the thunder a couple of housemaids entered, bent on obliterating from the room every sign of its having been occupied during the day.

Miss De Souza and Pole retreated with the precipitation that is invariable under such circumstances: and when the latter returned dressed, and found the candles lighted, and every cushion as smooth as if it were in an upholsterer's shop, the room was empty except for the figure of Dr. Mogg, who was rubbing his black-coated shoulder-blades against the rim of Mrs. Steinberg's chimneypiece, and was apparently endeavouring to catch sight of his shirt-front through his beard. He straightened himself as Pole entered, and relaxing into a ponderous smile, he said, "I am pleased, sir, to have the honour of again meeting you." Pole answered him with corresponding cordiality, which was, however, touched with a more mundane cheerfulness; and Mrs. Steinberg, when she appeared, trailing several yards of satin, was delighted to find her two gentlemen on what seemed to be the most satisfactory terms.

Dr. Mogg, despite his severity towards most forms of enjoyment, was by no means

bigoted against the grave pleasures of the table. He sucked up his first spoonful of soup with a noise like an incarnate sigh; and before long, encouraged by his two hostesses, he was expressing his opinions, which were by no means wanting in sense, about all sorts of matters connected with public and private life. It happened, however, that the name of Canon Bulman's bête noir—the politician who so lately had fallen by his private sins, was mentioned in connection with political questions; and this unfortunately led Mrs. Steinberg into a whispered conversation with him, which had reference to the moral side of the incident. The three Miss Cremers, who had excellent ears for a whisper, realized presently that he was referring to the heroine of the whole mischief, and remarking with wonder on the incredible turpitude of women who not only yielded to temptation, but actually were themselves tempters. "When we hear of such," he proceeded, "it makes us the more thankful to think of such elect vessels as the admirable lady upstairs, who, as we may humbly venture to say, have never in their whole lives known what it was either to tempt or to be tempted."

This was too much for the Miss Cremers. The youngest of them without warning burst into hysterical laughter; the two others spluttered; even Mrs. Steinberg struggled with her muscles. Pole was the only person who was absolutely grave and calm. Mrs. Steinberg, however, saved the situation by calling to the youngest Miss Cremer in a voice of extreme sharpness—

"Put your napkin up to your nose directly, Folly. Her nose is bleeding. Can't you see that—any of you? Take her out, and lay her flat on a sofa. These silly girls," she continued, turning to Dr. Mogg, "are always giggling over some foolish joke of their own. Come, Ethel, if Dr. Mogg will excuse us, we had better go and see what they have done with her, and he and Mr. Pole can join us when they have finished their wine."

Dr. Mogg could hardly conceive that such a subject as feminine virtue, which had in his mind severely limited meaning, could raise a smile except in the most abandoned company; but, all the same, a suspicion crept over him that the only person present who appreciated him seriously, was Pole. Pole accordingly rose high in his favour; and raised himself higher still by

the topic which he introduced now. This topic was Canon Bulman's League, with which he gathered that Dr. Mogg had some connection. And such indeed proved to be the case. Dr. Mogg was delighted at the interest which Pole exhibited in the subject; and proceeded to answer his questions with eagerness, yet with a certain reticence.

"Canon Bulman," he began solemnly, "is a churchman; I am a Nonconformist; but we both represent one particular opinion in which multitudes of churchmen and nonconformists agree. We are of opinion that a man who breaks a certain commandment has broken all; and it is not for nothing that in a special and emphatic sense we give to this commandment the name of the moral law. I don't say that other men may not pay some respect to it; but what we insist on is its enormous and overwhelming importance. It is for this reason we are so jealous of all forms of pleasure and frivolity. Well, sir, the object of our League is to organize the latent righteousness of the nation, so as to make it impossible for any man to enter Parliament, whose life and conduct have shown him to be careless of the law I speak of; and I am sure you will

sympathize with us in our object, even should you not deem it to be practicable."

"Do you think," said Pole, "that if it were so, and you were in reality to attain it, you would materially improve the Government, and consequently the condition, of the country?"

Dr. Mogg scratched his head, and wiped his mouth with his napkin.

"Probably," he said—"probably. I certainly incline to think so. But, Mr. Pole, I won't disguise it—the point you have raised is, for us, merely a side issue. What we want—if you will forgive the phrase—to be down upon, is not bad government, but the luxury of immoral living. We want to reach criminals whom the law cannot reach. We want to strip them of their false decency, and, in a word, to show them up—show them up," he repeated, bringing down his hand upon the table-cloth. "We want, Mr. Pole, to bring them to open shame."

"I don't know," replied Pole, "whether you have considered this question:—You say that the law cannot reach those criminals: but may not the law of libel reach those who endeavour to expose them? Unless a man has appeared publicly in the Divorce

Court, or has otherwise made any irregularity in his conduct notorious, it passes my wit to see how any League whatsoever can damage his character, without running the risk of getting into legal hot water itself—and very dirty legal hot water too."

Dr. Mogg frowned meditatively at some peach-stones that were lying on his dessert plate, and paused for a moment or two before making any answer. At last he said, with a sort of resigned sigh—

"Every cause has its dangers. As to this, Mr. Pole, I would answer you, if I could, more fully; but our exact plan of action is not yet ripe for disclosure. If, however, you would attend our meeting here next week, we shall, I assure you, be fraternally glad of your presence; and you would hear Canon Bulman explain as much as can be explained at present. Meanwhile, I may point out this to you. The objection you have suggested has less application to the case of a Parliamentary candidate than to any other. A constituency, or any section of constituents, has a primâ facie right to inquire into the private character of a man who publicly asks them to entrust their vital interests to him, which it might not have, judged by

mere worldly standards, to inquire into the character of an ordinary private citizen: and I believe it is this fact, quite as much as his strong political feelings, which has influenced Canon Bulman—a man of the world in its best sense—to withdraw his services from a Vigilance Society, called the Lily League, whose members were accustomed to follow any immoral man in the streets, and devote himself to founding the League of which we are now speaking."

"Well," said Pole, civilly, "should I be able to attend your meeting, I will, with your permission, write to you for one, or even more tickets."

"And indeed, sir," said Dr. Mogg, "I shall be much gratified in sending them. You, Mr. Pole, I am told, belong to one of our most ancient families. I should like to tell you that the English Nonconformists, as such, have no objection to an aristocracy. What they do object to is a frivolous and licentious aristocracy. I can assure you honestly that the winning of a horse-race by a peer, which is always associated with all manner of private profligacy, does far more to rouse the antagonism of conscientious Radicals than any action of the Lords as a

political body. Indeed," Dr. Mogg continued, as if imparting a State secret, "there is in our Radicalism a strong Conservative element. We resent the profligacy and the frivolity of the aristocratic classes partly because they tend to bring all wealth into contempt in the eyes of those whom God has not elected to be the possessors of it."

Pole could not help admiring the astuteness of this last remark. "I see," he said, as they rose to go into the drawing-room, "that you have the wisdom of the serpent amongst you, as well as the purity of—well, I can't say more — of women like Mrs. Blagdon."

CHAPTER X.

POLE'S life for the next few days was wintry and flowerless enough; but it was made tolerable by constant application to his work, and sometimes more than tolerable by the sympathy and companionship of Miss De Souza, whose influence was peculiar in being at once stimulating and soothing, and came to him like a breath of spring between bitter and frost-bound branches.

At last the evening arrived that was destined to bring Lord Wargrave. He and Mrs. Steinberg had been intimate friends for years; and when he entered the drawing-room they very nearly embraced.

"It is centuries," exclaimed Mrs. Steinberg, "I declare it's positively centuries, since you've dined with me in my own house. Come now, you faithless man, confess when you did so last, if you are

not ashamed of admitting how long ago it was."

"I remember," said Lord Wargrave, "your dinners so well, that the last one always seems to have taken place yesterday."

"Listen, young ladies," cried Mrs. Steinberg to the three Miss Cremers. "When will you, I wonder, have such a compliment paid to you as that!"

Lord Wargrave meanwhile having wrung Pole by the hand, and compressed his verbal salutations into a mere muttered "God bless you," walked hastily to a table on which the papers of the day were lying, and began, with some impatience, to push them about, examining them. "You haven't *The Times* here," he grunted, turning to Mrs. Steinberg.

"Dear Lord Wargrave," said Mrs. Steinberg, "I'll ring the bell and send for it. It is most likely upstairs in bed with poor Martha Blagdon."

"No matter," said Lord Wargrave, with an air of being not altogether discontented. "I've a copy of my own somewhere. I'll send for it after dinner."

Whatever his interest in this paper was, dinner was enough for the time to put it out of his head; and as soon as he and Pole were left together over their wine, he began to discuss what he called a "little bit of family business."

"I should," he said, "have written, if I had not heard I was to meet you here. What I want to say to you is this. Before many weeks are over Parliament will have reassembled; and from all I can hear there will be a very unusual thing—not only an Autumn Session, but something like an Autumn Season. Our friend the Duchess of Dulverton is actually going to give a ball, with a view to keeping in town till the critical division is over, all the respectable Whigs, as well as the Conservatives. The idea, I need hardly say, is not hers, but the Duke's. All the same, if it succeeds, it will prove, what I have always maintained, that the part of the great lady in politics is by no means played out yet. Well, my dear Reginald, the practical point is this. You really ought to persuade that excellent sweet mother of yours to come for a month or so to my house in Brook Street, and bring up with her your delightful Austrian Venus, who rose, under such respectable auspices, out of the West of England foam. The only rent I shall ask will be that you shall bring

some servants, as I've nobody there myself but my own man and a housemaid. Your mother need have no scruples in accepting what I propose. I should profit by it quite as much as you and she would."

To Pole for many reasons this proposal was pleasing; but whilst he was assuring Lord Wargrave that he would do his best to recommend it to his mother, a folded copy of *The Times* was put into Lord Wargrave's hand. "Come," said Lord Wargrave, waving the paper like a bâton. "I'm going to tell those charming ladies something about you, which, so far as I can gather, you don't even know yourself."

Completely mystified, Pole rose and followed Lord Wargrave, who, on entering the drawing-room, took up his position on the hearth-rug, and confronted the company, with *The Times* still in his hand. "At dinner," he began, "Mrs. Steinberg was talking to me about our friend here, and saying that he was a rising man. I'll read you something to show you how far she was right."

"Dear Lord Wargrave," said Mrs. Steinberg, who had not quite followed him, "oh, do read to us. That will be too delightful of you. I remember those charming ballads of

Alfred de Musset, which you used to read to us long ago in Paris."

"Listen," said Lord Wargrave, when he had found his place in the paper. "This is from a leading article. I need read you only part of it.

"Government Blue Books and the Reports of Royal Commissions frequently fail to be useful even to the professional politician. They rarely affect public opinion directly, for the general public very rarely read them; and still more rarely do they reflect any personal lustre on their authors. The Report on Trades Unionism on the Continent, which is just completed, and will be laid next month before Parliament, promises to be a signal exception to these general rules. The subject is far wider than the title indicates. It embraces nearly all the questions relating to the condition of the working classes, which a certain extreme party in the country are at the present moment endeavouring to make their own; and the crude theories which, borrowed from France and Germany, the more reckless of our own politicians are now beginning to advocate, are not only stated here with the utmost fulness and lucidity, but accurate and brilliant accounts are given of those social experiments by which, in different countries, and at different times, the value of these theories has been tested.

"' The writer of this volume, Mr. Reginald Pole, is to be congratulated as an author, as a political philosopher, and as a statesman; for the qualities which make a man great in each of these three capacities, are present throughout his pages to a high and most unusual degree. They are sufficiently rare when separate. They are rarer still in combination. Mr. Pole's name has hitherto been little before the public; but in the inner circles of the political world his abilities have been recognized as remarkable for some years past, though their full extent has not been suspected till now; and we are much deceived. and the country will be much disappointed, if their full development has even yet been reached. Whether Mr. Pole, in the party sense of the word, may call himself a Liberal or a Tory, we neither know nor care; but his support, in whatever way it be given, would be a support, we do not hesitate to say, of which any moderate Government, when dealing with social questions, might feel proud.'

"There!" said Lord Wargrave, bringing

down his hand on his knees. "What do you think of that?"

"Dear Mr. Pole," exclaimed Mrs. Steinberg, "this is really delightful. This is fame running out to meet you. It is such a joy to me to think of all your talent being appreciated. My dear husband used to say, when speaking of the career of talent, 'Appreciation is opportunity.'"

"Humph," muttered Lord Wargrave, "that's exceeding well said. Yes—yes. To be appreciated at the right moment, is the rarest luck for ambition, and it's positively the elixir of vanity. However, our friend here is not, I think, vain; so half the value of it, I'm afraid, will be completely thrown away on him. By the way," he continued, "I see in the papers that our good friend Canon Bulman and Dr. Mogg, of Manchester, have started a league, as they call it, which is to unite all ugly Christians in blackmailing Conservative candidates who are better looking than themselves."

"To be sure," exclaimed Mrs. Steinberg— "to be sure—what am I thinking of? There's going to be a meeting of this wonderful League to-morrow—here, Lord Wargrave, here in Thames Wickham; and Mrs. Blagdon intends to exchange the comfort of her bed for the honour of a chair on the platform by Dr. Mogg's side. Dr. Mogg has promised Mr. Pole as many tickets as he wants, in case you or he should either of you care to go."

"Ethel," exclaimed a Miss Cremer, "let us all go!"

"Not from this house," said Mrs. Steinberg, with much decision, "that is to say," she added, "if you want to sit on the platform: though of course Mr. Pole and Lord Wargrave never would think of that. As for Canon Bulman, no doubt he may be charming socially; but his public opinions are really very reprehensible — hardly fit, indeed, for young ladies to listen to."

"There is," said Miss De Souza, "an organ-loft in the Town Hall. Perhaps my aunt will allow us to hide our blushes there."

"Well, dears," said Mrs. Steinberg, mollified, "the organ-loft, I know, is dark; and if you got places there, you would none of you be observed by anybody. We could send to Dr. Mogg, and no doubt he would have the seats reserved for us."

Lord Wargrave, whose curiosity was omnivorous, had already determined to be present: so a letter was sent to Dr. Mogg,

and an order for the seats obtained. When the evening came, Mrs. Blagdon, wheezing under a cloud of shawls, was despatched in a hired landau, having dined in her own room. Then the rest of the party, after an interval of ten minutes, followed unknown to her, in a couple of four-wheel cabs, and entered the building unnoticed, by a door in a side street.

When they reached their seats, the proceedings were just about to begin. The body of the hall was gloomy with the backs of a middle-class crowd, on whose black coats and bonnets the gaslight made no impression. But the platform, though its occupants were attired with no less severity, was lighted more strongly, and was speckled with pink faces. The chairman, a local minister, dressed like a High-Church curate, was pulling his long black beard, and was looking at the clock nervously, whilst his mouth, with its bitter smile, was twitching with preparations for speech. Dr. Mogg was on his left, grim but yet benevolent. Next to Dr. Mogg, and so far overlapping her chair that she seemed to be leaning on the shoulder of her ghostly counsellor, was Mrs. Blagdon, crimson with devout importance;

and on the chairman's right, his head well in the air, his lips firmly clenched, and his eyebrows knit defiantly, was the principal speaker, and the hero of the occasion, Canon Bulman.

When the minute-hand of the clock pointed to half-past eight, the chairman jumped up, and addressing his "friends, brethren, and sisters," announced that before going further, they would sing three verses of a hymn, a copy of which would be found on every seat. He had hardly spoken when just over Lord Wargrave's head, the organ began to rumble; and the hymn in question was started by some trained voices on the platform.

"Let every home a Salem be!

Let doubt and discord prove

It's chastening guests if Jah so wills,

But not unlicensed love."

Such was the opening verse; and what followed was suitable. The closing Amen was still echoing in the roof, when the chairman, who possessed at least the merit of promptitude, had rapped the table in front of him, and had begun to inform his hearers that he would confine himself to the business of introducing the principal speaker of the

evening. He said that most of those present were, he believed, Nonconformists, whilst the principal speaker would be a cleryman of the Established Church; and this fact was typical of the purpose of the meeting, which was to unite Christians, no matter how divided otherwise, in defending one principal equally dear to all of them. That principle was the principle of moral spotlessness. They knew what he meant by that. It was one thing, and one thing only. Let there be no vagueness about the matter. Party politics, he said, were to be strictly excluded from the meeting; but he felt he should be justified in alluding to one bright sign of the times—a sign like a star, which to-night was shining close to them. This star was Canon Bulman himself. Canon Bulman, highly placed as he was in the hierarchy of the Established Church, courted by earthly princes, whose favour he valued at what it was worth-Canon Bulman was in favour of Disestablishment. An Olympian smile of assent passed over the Canon's lips, and a cheer, as solemn as an Amen, rose from the attentive audience. It was therefore, the chairman observed, peculiarly cheering to them, to know that when the Established Church should be called on to divide her temporal riches, as well as renounce her temporal supremacy, they had one before them, who, though personally he had much to lose, was prepared to cast his all into the great National treasury. He would now call on Canon Bulman to address the meeting.

The Canon whose face during the last few moments had undergone a slight change of expression, now rose, and coming forward with a not ungraceful movement, began to speak in a voice which by its refinement and cultivated modulations, formed a striking contrast to the utterances of the preceding speakers. Nor was the difference in his tone less striking. The Chairman's speech had had in it a vein of acrid piety. The Canon began as though he were nothing if not business-like.

"I rise to speak," he said, "having two objects in view, an immediate object, and an ulterior object. I shall explain the latter best by dealing first with the former. My immediate object is to claim your support for a resolution which will be submitted to you at the close of to-night's proceedings; and the terms of the resolution are as follows:—'In the opinion of this meeting no

man, whatever his abilities, is fit to sit in parliament and legislate for a Christian country, who is in his own person a violater of the moral law, and such being the case it is desirable that a league should be forthwith formed for the purpose of inquiring, wherever any doubt exists, into the private morality of persons offering themselves for parliamentary election. Furthermore this meeting is of opinion that when any candidate, no matter what his party, is shown on inquiry to be a person of immoral life, it is the duty of all Christians, no matter what their party, to secure his withdrawal, or to record their vote against him.'

"There," the Canon continued, "is the Resolution you will be asked to pass. I will now briefly explain to you the practical points implied in it. A League of this kind, if it is to do practical work, must have a careful organization, a variety of competent officers, and fitting local habitations. It must furthermore have a definite policy, and must be content to begin with limited, but definite and concentrated effort. And here," said the Canon, taking up a piece of paper from the table, "I pause to answer a question, which has been submitted to me at the

beginning of the meeting, in order, I suppose, to make sure of my being explicit as to the subject it refers to. The question asked is, 'What means do you propose to take, firstly to discover the offences of an immoral candidate, and secondly, to bring them publicly home to him.' Well," said the Canon, not with the best grace in the world, "it may perhaps have occurred to the gentleman who put that question-I am sure with the best intentions—that it is a question which must have many answers. When the offence is notorious—as in a case lately before the country—our course is simple. When it is an offence not legally proved, but notorious nevertheless, our course will be simple still. Our only difficulty will arise where the offence has been more artfully concealed, or is at any rate less widely known, or where its commission may be reasonably doubted. Well, gentlemen, in such cases, the nature of the courses to be pursued will depend altogether on the exact circumstances, and will have to be left to the judgment of such judicious and Christian men as may be elected to the task by the League, in each constituency. All I can say is, that in such cases, our first endeavour will be to deal with

the offender privately, and either assure ourselves of his humble repentance, or attempt to force him back into the obscurity of private life, before taking any steps to make his offence public. As for evidence, in such cases, it is rarely far to seek. The immoral man sins less secretly than he imagines. My own experience of him is, that he is like the ostrich with its head in the sand." These last words were received with a long mutter of applause, being taken as an allusion to the gallantries of one of the sitting members "And now," confor Thames Wickham. tinued the Canon, "I will return to my former point. We propose, I was saying, to begin with a limited but concentrated effort. We propose to begin with the formation of three, or perhaps four branches, in the constituencies near London, one of them being the constituency in which this meeting is held; and it is hoped that, if we are supported, as we hope to be, we may very shortly be in working order. Of the reasons which have induced us to think that our efforts would be exceptionally useful here, it is not necessary that I should speak. I will rather," he continued, encouraged by a sympathetic groan, "proceed to the more general aspect of the

question; and show you how the application of this great moral test will, besides subserving the cause of purity, tend indirectly to liberalize "—the Canon stopped and hesitated for a moment, feeling that he had inadvertently slipped into party-politics; but putting a bold face on the matter, he repeated the word emphatically—"to liberalize, I say, in the best sense of the word, the whole course of legislation."

He proceeded to do this with a skill that was suitable to the occasion. He drew a series of pictures, familiar to the youngest person in the audience, which he said would be recognized as types of the various kinds of men who had figured in politics hithertomen who affected care for the welfare of the poor and suffering, but whose own lives were a round of pleasures, of frivolity, and of intoxication; who openly divided their time between dancing, sport, and the card-table, or worse still, the blackguardism of the execrable race-course. The Canon, in fact, indulged in a time-honoured caricature of the ways and amusements of those whose society was most sought by himself.

"And in order to secure, or in order to protect such pleasures," he exclaimed,

"these men are ready to depopulate whole districts in Scotland, to tear the roof-tree from the hovel of the wretched Connemara peasant, to prop up the fraudulent cause of Capital in its war against Labour." At these words there occurred a slight disturbance, and cries of "No, no," were heard from several parts of the building. The Canon saw that oratorically he had made a false step. "The cause of Capital," he repeated, correcting himself, "even when that cause is fraudulent; and to employ a body of selfish and irresponsible legislators, to undo the work of those who really represent the people." The expressions of delight with which this last sentence was greeted, more than atoned for the hostility which had manifested itself a moment ago. "These then," continued the Canon, "are the men whom our moral tests will exclude; and now having put before you-I solemnly and sincerely trust without reference to party - the political bearings of the movement, and awakened in you—as I trust I have—a desire to support and to assist it, let me do what will stimulate that desire still further. Let me reinforce the agreements of the political organizer with those of the Christian

minister, and dwell on the enormity of that special sin, in comparison with which all other sin is venial, and against which our League is a moral, far more than a political, protest."

The Canon was a born orator. Having roused the feelings of his hearers to what they had felt to be a climax, he was now working them up to a yet higher pitch, the force of his words being heightened by their obvious influence in himself. All along he had spoken with a certain trenchant energy; but hitherto it had been the energy of a partisan; it was now that of the religious or moral revivalist. His face flushed, his gestures became more marked, and the white of his eyes occasionally was seen glittering above the pupils. His audience, the women especially, began to lean forward, eager to have their hatred of sin intensified by as clear a description of it as the indiscretion of enthusiasm could supply them with. Nor did the Canon disappoint them. The solemn men with puffy and pasty faces, and their solid wives, with boas and corkscrew curls, and square cameo brooches glimmering under their treble chins, opened their ears wide to the waters of the Canon's eloquence.

Drops of perspiration began to bead themselves on his forehead, as he emphasized the vileness of man's physical nature, until it was transfigured by the respectable magic of matrimony, and as he adjured every husband to perform the feat of imagining his partner's honour assaulted by some perfumed scoundrel. This indeed was a singularly successful point; for though the husbands may have found their imaginations hardly equal to the demand thus made on them, the ladies found little difficulty in imagining such a calamity happening to themselves: and still less in imagining their lords exposed to a corresponding peril. The Canon did his best to assist the imagination of the most sluggish. Mrs. Blagdon, devoutly delighted, beat time with her silk boots, and the light of ecstatic virtue oozed from her upturned eyes.

At last he began to work up to his peroration.

"False sentiment," he said, "masquerading as Christian charity—charity, the extreme virtue which, being such, is the most near to sin—false sentiment, I repeat, developed and cultivated amongst the rich in the interests of the rich, will endeavour again,

as it ever has done in the past, to make us think lightly, mercifully, even kindly, of this hideous thing, immorality. It will even try to garnish it with the fair colours of poetry. Horrible prostitution of that noble and lovely art!" The Canon for the moment seemed to have forgotten the kind of assembly he was addressing, and impressed them all the more, by following his own thoughts over their heads. "Launcelot and Guinivere," he exclaimed, "and those blots on the Divine Comedy, the figures of Paolo and Francesca, for which poets beseech our sympathy—what is there under it all? I will tell you. There is nothing under it but the feelings of pigs for pigs! There is nothing at which the Christian stomach will not vomit! I do not mince matters, and I dare not. Oh, my friends, this false sentiment would even go so far as to plead with us that we are all human, all liable to temptation, that we might ourselves at any moment be even as these are whom we are invited to condemn. I tell you that this is not so-that these insidious pleadings are sophistry. Would any one of us here-God-fearing men and women-not resent it as an insult were it to be said to him or her, 'To-morrow you

may be picking your neighbour's pocket; tomorrow, for all I know, you may be shooting your neighbour in a fit of anger; or in a fit of petulance taking your own life!' In the same way we should resent the voice of that false humility which may say to you, 'Tomorrow you yourself may be guilty of an immoral act.' If anything is voluntary it is this-it is immoral conduct; it is this deliberate stepping out of the clean and straight high-road into a seething and filthy ditch: and when we presently ask you to pass the Resolution which will be put to you, that immorality in our legislators shall be no longer tolerated, and that you will join with us heart and soul in refusing to cast your votes in favour of any man who has not a clean moral record-I say, when we ask you to pass this Resolution unanimously, let no false charity unnerve you or make you hesitate. All that we shall be really asking is that each one of you say in his heart, Whenever an immoral man shall solicit my parliamentary suffrage I will do to him only what I would do for a like offence to my own wife, to my own daughter, to my own son. So far as in me lies, I will cast him off; I will cast him out!"

The Canon sat down amidst a noise of umbrellas that beat the floor; and before this had subsided. Miss De Souza, who had for some time been biting her lip with disgust, contempt, and indignation, felt her arm seized violently by Lord Wargrave. His hat was already on his head, and looking at her under his bushy eyebrows, he simply said, "Come," and bustled towards the door. The others followed him. Their cabs were awaiting them in the street; and in ten minutes more they were back again in Mrs. Steinberg's dining-room, where their hostess, who welcomed their return as if they had been gone for years, had provided a supper of soup, cold chicken, and oysters.

"Well, dears," she said, when she had learnt, in answer to her inquiries, that Mrs. Blagdon was still enjoying the delights of purity on the platform, "and what was the Canon like? I do hope he said nothing very shocking."

"I feel," said Miss De Souza, "that if I heard many more speeches such as his, I should be ready to elope with the first man who asked me."

Mrs. Steinberg was an odd mixture of primness and worldly common sense. "How

did it strike you?" she said, in an anxious voice to Lord Wargrave.

Lord Wargrave answered her with a placid and leisurely sententiousness. "So far as the people are concerned for whom the speech was meant, it was," he said, "the greatest success that can be imagined. It was admirable. The Puritan middle-classes never read French novels. They get all their literary immorality in these protests against it.''

CHAPTER XI.

THE following day Lord Wargrave departed; but before doing so he extracted a renewed promise from Pole, to write to his mother on the subject of the house in Brook Street. As for Pole himself, he remained for a week longer at Thames Wickham, distracted by his pressing employments, and elated by the recognition he had met with, but still aching with the frost which had bitten below the surface of his consciousness. Every morning he had, to his own surprise, found that the hope of a letter with the signature of Pansy Masters, had sprung up in his heart, like a solitary and shivering snowdrop; and every morning on the arrival of the post, it had been killed. But hard work, together with Miss De Souza's companionship, had enabled him to get through the hours with a certain semblance of cheerfulness, inward as well as outward. At the end of the week, however,

the work that had till now been absorbing him was accomplished; and left him face to face with his own blank unhappiness. His sense of having been abandoned and finally cut adrift by the woman to whom for so long he had given and been so much, did not indeed become sharper; but it sunk yet deeper into his mind, and pervaded it more completely; and it was against this darkening and extending background of loss that Countess Shimna's image gradually grew more glittering. Miss De Souza's charms would very often dissolve it, or make it dim; but whenever he was alone it would come shining back to him, growing brighter and brighter, as if by hidden witchcraft: and meanwhile he was growing conscious of a fact which at once surprised and pained him. He was growing shy of Miss De Souza's sympathy, and anxious to escape its influence. It touched too nearly, despite its healing qualities, that part of his heart which had been so torn and wounded. Countess Shimna's image on the contrary lured him far away from it.

All his thoughts accordingly were now turning towards Glenlynn; but unwilling to leave Mrs. Steinberg abruptly, the moment

her hospitality ceased to be an obvious convenience to him, he did not for a day or two, say anything to her about his departure. At last one evening a small packet arrived for him, which he forbore to open till he was in his bedroom dressing for dinner. It contained, as was evident, a photograph; and in extracting this his hands trembled. At first sight of it, he drew a long and bitter sigh; then holding it to the candle he began studying it minutely. It was a photograph of Countess Shimna. He became breathless as he looked at it. The curves of her throat and figure, and the delicate moulding of her hands, the lines of her evening dress half hidden by a fur-trimmed opera-cloak, stirred his imagination by the perfection of their insolent daintiness; whilst her eyes, dim and velvety with some exquisite languor, gave to this flower of the world the bewildering scent of passion. The sound of her voice, as he looked, was again echoing in his ears; a moonlit memory of her lips fluttered and trembled upon his own; he heard the music of her barbaric Russian melodies. Presently the question occurred to him of who had sent the picture. Was it she herself or his mother? He examined the direction of the packet; most of it had been torn away, but as he handled the paper a note fell out of its folds. He opened it, and found these lines:—

"Dear Mr. Pole,

"Tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse. By now, no doubt, you have very nearly forgotten me. This, perhaps, will prevent the forgetfulness being quite complete. The photograph was done in Paris, and some copies have just reached me. I have often seen your mother, and I learnt your address from her.

"Shimna."

A breath came from the paper of the peculiar perfume which he associated with her. He had already written to his mother to say he would return presently. He now said, as he dressed himself, "I will go down to-morrow."

It was easy to excuse himself to Mrs. Steinberg for leaving her at so short a notice; but he decided, in order to seem as little abrupt as possible, to remain till the following evening, and to travel by the night mail. He would thus arrive at Lyncombe in the early morning; and it occurred to him that

he could dress and breakfast there at an hotel, and, before driving out to Glenlynn, call at Countess Shimna's cottage.

The sun was brilliant in the east, though the dew had not yet begun to dry, when the train came sliding along the craggy and tortuous valley through which Lyncombe was reached—it seemed almost miraculously -by its railway. High on the slopes the shadows were clinging to the headlong woods; shining sheep were dotting precipitous pastures; whilst here and there, from the greenness, some limestone rock protruded itself. Then came houses rising among banks of foliage, and showing the quiet whiteness of windows not yet awakened: and then the train arrested itself at a long gravelled platform, beyond whose prim palings were one or two cabs and omnibuses.

To Pole fresh from the suburban atmosphere of Thames Wickham, there was something singularly invigorating in the impact of the free West-Country morning, amber with summer sunshine, and yet smarting with a breath from Autumn. He drove up the hill to the hotel where he meant to breakfast, surprised at the vigour with which his spirits

rose. His bath in the hotel bedroom was delightful to him; and the hotel coffee-room with its mutton-chops and its clumsy toast, had something exciting in it, as though it were in some strange country.

Reflecting that he ought not to call on Countess Shimna too early, he lingered long over his meal and the local newspapers; and then sauntered slowly through the air, which was now warm, to her lodgings, timing himself so as to reach her door a little after eleven o'clock. "It can hardly be too early now," he thought as he rang the bell; and yet as he waited before the porch admiring the picturesque dwelling, he was conscious of a feeling that nearly resembled shyness. This feeling, however, gave place to another, when a pink-cheeked English maid-servant appeared presently in the doorway, and informed him with a stolid smile that the Countess had gone out already, and would not be back for luncheon.

"Was she driving?" asked Pole, sharply.
"She has gone possibly to Glenlynn."

"I could not say," was the answer, where the Countess has gone. She was on foot, and had her maid with her."

Pole reflected for a moment, and walked

away rapidly. He ordered a fly, and despatched his luggage by it to Glenlynn, sending a message, by his servant, that he himself would walk. Countess Shimna, he thought, might perhaps be going out in the launch, which had, as he knew, been left at Lyncombe for her use. He descended the hill briskly. Lyncombe was still full; and here and there some moving figure with a parasol beguiled him for a moment into fancying it the woman he sought. But each, as he approached it, resolved itself into some ordinary holidaymaking visitor; and at last he saw the launch lying idle and empty in the harbour. This second disappointment being completed, he set out for Glenlynn. Instead of going by the coach road, he chose another way, which, though somewhat longer, was in parts of it more beautiful, and gave him-so he persuaded himself-one more chance of overtaking her. It lay through a wooded valley, in the bottom of which was a rock-strewn river. About a mile and a half from Lyncombe this valley divided itself into three; and through each of these from the moor came a leaping and pouring stream. The spot where the three united was known as "The Meeting of the Waters;" and its nut-brown sleeping pools full of reflected woodland, and its lines of falling foam, which flickered under the sylvan twilight, formed the subject of countless photographs on sale in the Lyncombe shops. Pole, until his feet had brought him thus far on his journey, had been buoyed up by the thought that he might discover Countess Shimna here. But when he reached the Meeting of the Waters, where the narrow path expanded itself, and offered a space for some rustic seats and summer-houses, everything was deserted. There was not a human being anywhere.

He stood still for a short time, meditating. He then resumed his walk, taking a path yet narrower, which ran up one of the glens, burrowing amongst trees and underwood. Not having succeeded in obtaining Countess Shimna's society, a sense, as he went, came pleasantly stealing over him of rest and ease in the ever-deepening solitude; and by-and-by he began to talk aloud to himself. "No doubt," he said, "my heart is shipwrecked; but it shall save its life as Ulysses did; and she shall make a home for it—the Calypso of a magic island." The scene

around him at that moment, might have been in some such island itself, so far away did he feel himself from all human ears. The only sound was the fall of the rustling stream, or the faint lisp of the leafage as it played with the mid-day sunlight, and dappled with shadows the silken silver of the beech-stems, or the mouse-coloured ground that was under them, bare amongst slopes of vegetation. He had hardly uttered the words, swinging his stick as he did so, and picking his way amongst the rolling stones that were on the path, when, on turning a corner, he was startled by a flash of colour, red as poppy, and extending itself at the foot of a beech-tree. It was a scarlet cloak or shawl, and a female figure was reclining on it. By her side was lying a parasol with a gold handle; and a soft, dove-coloured hat was tipped over her dusky hair-hair which shone where crimping had given it an intermittent curve, and which caressed the nape of her neck with a little curling wave; whilst her insteps, arching like a ripple on the brook close by, were showing their outline through the bronze of the leather that was laced over them. She had been looking down at her lap, but the sound of Pole's tread

roused her. She raised her eyes to his. From his lips came a single unpremeditated exclamation—"Shimna!"

Of how she answered him he had no very clear idea. It might have been by a word: it might have been by a mere cry: but these sounds interchanged between them had said more than either realized. Before she had time to rise, he was close to her, and their hands were joined. Her eyes were pools of purple, with a tremulous light laughing in In a few breathless sentences he explained to her that he had just arrived; he thanked her for her photograph; he told her he had been to call on her; and she in return imparted to him the striking and original information that walking was her favourite exercise. Then there was a lull in speaking. He stood before her in the shade, and looked She seemed to him like down at her. Rosalind, as Watteau would have conceived and painted her, had the Paris fashions of our day been the court fashions of his. fanciful thought had hardly had time to shape itself, when something happened in her eyes. It was as though the buoyant lights there had been suddenly put out, and depths of melting darkness had as suddenly opened

themselves before him. They were depths which, as he looked at them, seemed to expand and deepen.

Had he been told an hour ago that he would find himself in this situation, he would have been puzzled considerably to know in what way he would comport himself-above all, what words he would use, and the tone of voice which he would adopt. But once more the impulse of the unexpected moment solved his doubts before he had begun to be conscious of them. He presently uttered to her, hardly knowing that he spoke, one of the most ordinary, but at the same time one of the most intimate terms of endearment. which exists in the vocabulary of lovers. The sound was less like a word than a thought which had involuntarily become visible. As for her, her lips relaxed like a bud that is about to open. She extended her hand to him and murmured, "Come, and sit down here by me."

He slowly obeyed her, extending himself on the sloping ground at her side. But even as he did so, his thoughts took a rapid and sorrowful flight to another woman; and over his mind, lightly as a bird's shadow, there passed the memory of Virgil's undying line, which describes the lost Eurydice, but which Pole appropriated to himself: "Invalidasque tibi tendens, heu non tua, palmas." The syllables, however, had hardly quitted his consciousness before he realized where he was; and a touch of Countess Shimna's hand recalled him to the actual moment. She had raised herself into a sitting attitude, and she now was looking down on him. He held her hand, and drew her gradually towards himself. As her jacket came nearer, he breathed again from her dress that subtle penetrating perfume, which seemed to have been distilled from the petals of a hundred passionate memories.

"Shimna," he exclaimed in a low, hurried whisper, "I have come back to you. Do you care to see me? But first I should tell you this. You may perhaps have guessed it. I do not come alone. I can never come alone to anybody. I have certain sorrows which I live with, and they have limped after me to your very feet."

His eyes were aware that she made some gentle but abrupt movement; but they were aware of nothing more. The next thing that spoke to him was the touch of her lips on his. The touch was as gentle as the touch

of a leaf, swayed by a light wind; but there was no shyness in it.

"I will," she said, "ask you nothing about your sorrows. I like you the better for having them:—only now—now—forget them —forget them—forget them!"

She spoke like a mother bending over a suffering child; and with each repetition of the words, her lips once more brushed his. A few seconds later she was looking at him with an expression which was full of tenderness, but the quick light of espieglerie was again dancing in her eyes: and she said to him with a soft laugh, "Come now-let us talk about other things." She pressed his hand as she spoke, and gently withdrew hers from it. He could for a moment hardly believe his senses. What bewildered him most was not the consciousness of her kisses, but this almost magical change from a passionate to a laughing tenderness; and it delighted him even more than it bewildered him. She seemed, by some fairy art, possessed by no other woman, to have turned what poets describe as "the wine of passion," into a light elixir, which, instead of intoxicating the pulses, thrilled them with a new vitality; and to have removed the weight from love, without attenuating its strength. He had seen much of the world; but here was a new experience. The next moment, however, he had recovered his self-possession; and his mood was answering hers like an instrument in tune with another.

"What is the time?" she said presently. "It is nearly one o'clock. I have come out here to picnic. My maid has gone on in front of me. She has a basket full of sandwiches. There is plenty for all of us, and you and I will lunch together. Take my shawl, and let us climb the hill. I have," she continued, as they began to walk, "been here once or twice before, and I have always had my feast farther on in the sunshine. Clarisse knows the place. We shall find her there waiting for us."

In five minutes' time, the path, through an arch of woodland, began to show them a vision of open country, with shadeless sunlight brilliant on slanting heather; and there, as Countess Shimna expected, close to where the trees ended, was her maid seated on a heather tuft, with a stream babbling close to her.

"Clarisse," said Countess Shimna, in clear little crisp accents, that were at once

caressing and imperious, "open your basket and give Mr. Pole some déjeuner. He is walking home, and will faint if we do not feed him."

With trained agility the maid obeyed her orders. The contents of the basket were set out on a napkin; and then she herself, receiving her own portion, retired to a distance with a tact which suggested considerable experience. Pole and Countess Shimna seated themselves on cushions of purple bells, laughing like children as they undid the packages, and shared a single tumbler and a small bottle of claret, tempering the last with water dipped up by him from the stream.

At last Pole began. "I have so many things to say to you." But she shook her head and interrupted him. "No," she said, "not now. Let us for the present be content with the present moment."

He divined in her words a shrinking from anything like serious speech. "What I want to say," he answered, with a half-bantering laugh which reassured her, "is something that must be said; it is so commonplace and practical. You must come to us at Glenlynn. My mother wishes to have you.

You must come soon—do you hear?—soon, soon. You will do that, won't you?"

- "Perhaps," she said, "perhaps—if your mother really wishes for me."
- "Well," he replied, "I am not going to press you now. But to-morrow or next day a letter from her will come for you; and you must let me go with the belief that your answer to that letter will be Yes."
- "Good-bye," she said, as he rose to resume his walk; and not committing herself to any distinct promise, she waved her hand to him as he went, and looked after him with laughing eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

HE turned away from her with an unnatural summer in his heart. His progress home was marked by one outward incident only, and this took place not far from Glenlynn, at the spot where the path which he had been following joined the coach road. Here his ears were greeted by the sound of advancing wheels; and he presently saw a farmer's spring-cart rapidly coming towards him and carrying two persons. One of them, as they drew nearer, proved to be a country lad; but it was not till the cart was just about to pass him that he recognized the other as Dr. Clitheroe.

"Mr. Pole," exclaimed the Doctor, as the vehicle drew up abruptly, "I hadn't an idea that you had come back from London. I am glad—glad indeed, to have thus chanced to meet you. I have been suddenly called away—called by telegraph; and I have not

had even time to say good-bye to your mother. I shall write of course; but pray thank her for me for all her kindness; and I, vivâ voce, thank you also for yours. Work, work, work," he said, pointing to two despatch-boxes. "With me, you see, it is always the old story." Pole saw that the cart was laden with other luggage as well. "Yes," continued the Doctor, answering Pole's glance, "I shall, I much fear, not be coming back again to Glenlynn. I must not delay a moment, or else I shall miss my train. Once more, good-bye. Now, Jemmy, drive on."

On reaching home Pole found a second luncheon awaiting him, for which his exhilarated spirits provided him with a good appetite. As his mother watched him eating, he told her of Dr. Clitheroe's departure—an event which surprised her considerably; and then of his meeting with Countess Shimna, though his account of this last was naturally not quite complete. These bits of news being disposed of, the two began at once discussing, first the question of Lord Wargrave's house in London, and secondly, the question of their asking Countess Shimna to share it with them.

The result was that a letter to Countess Shimna was sent in to Lyncombe the following morning by messenger, begging her forthwith to pay them another visit; and ending with the postscript, "There is a certain little plan which my son and I are very anxious to propose to you." A letter moreover was duly posted to Lord Wargrave, which contained, on Mrs. Pole's part, a definite acceptance of his proposal, and also said to him, "We will, if we can possibly manage it, bring our young lady with us, whom you are very right to admire. I have just written to ask her to come and stay with us to-morrow; and I shall lose no time in putting the plan before her."

Countess Shimna's answer came duly back by the messenger. She accepted the invitation with expressions of pleasure and gratitude, mentioning, however, that she could not arrive before dinner-time; and Pole accordingly, as on a former occasion, did not encounter her till he had dressed and had gone downstairs.

He had been wondering, not unnaturally, in what way she would receive him. Would she show any memory of what had passed

between them under the glimmering beechtrees? And what should be his own demeanour supposing that hers were doubtful? But all these questions, so he found, were rendered unnecessary by the fact that, when he entered the drawing-room, her arm was round Mrs. Pole's waist, and the two were talking and laughing together like an aunt and a caressing niece. On seeing him she disengaged her arm, and advanced towards him with the frankest cordiality; and for all that her manner would have shown an observer to the contrary, she might have been merely a young lady in a ballroom welcoming a favourite partner.

His position he felt was strange. To what would his intimacy with her lead? The past and the future alike became incalculable. But his inability to speak to her in private left him more time to observe her; and the result of his observation was not a surprise only, but a shock to him. It began in the form of a mere vague consciousness that she disappointed him. At first he attributed this to the cordiality of her welcome, which might, by its frankness, have suggested that it had nothing warmer to conceal; or else to her affection for his mother, which might

have suggested that to him she was a sister. But he soon saw that it was due to a very different cause. She fascinated him still, not as a relation, but as a woman. She fascinated him as she had done under the beech-trees; and even more now than then. But she did nothing beyond fascinating him. Another woman, he reflected, bound to him by a tie which all churches condemn, had touched the sources in him from which all their religion springs. And yet the more Countess Shimna suffered by this comparison, the more were his eyes, by a perverse attraction, drawn towards her; whilst his doubting thoughts as he looked, became more and more distinct. Her dress, which clipped her waist, but fell from her back loosely, had the delicate pink and the waxy gleam of a begonia; and as she stood by the fire, slightly lifting her skirt, the pink was fringed by a delicate foam of lace. It was a dress which she herself would have probably called a tea-gown; and as such, no doubt it was theoretically suited to the occasion; but whether owing to any quality of its own, or to the way in which its wearer wore it, it struck Pole as somehow being too perfect. The little spray of diamonds which he saw trembling in her hair, and the paste buckle which called the eye to her instep, emphasized this effect.

"Don't," said Pole to his mother, when Countess Shimna was occupying herself with Miss Drake, "don't let us trouble her to-night with any mention of our London plans. Let us wait till to-morrow, when we can talk it over with her quietly."

Mrs. Pole nodded. "The subject," she said, "might as well be broached by you. I am longing that she should come. I tell you I'm quite in love with her."

And indeed at dinner, Pole, though his own impression of her remained unchanged, could not wonder at the effect which she produced upon his mother. Her liking for the elder woman—a woman so different from herself— was evidently altogether genuine, and produced in her a wish to please, almost as though she were bent on the conquest of some man. She told Mrs. Pole stories—one after the other—of her past life in all kinds of places and societies—of journeys in sleighs over the wintry snows of Poland— of autumns on the Italian lakes—of summers at French bathing-places; and each description she gave was shining with life and

colour, and also had in it somehow the bloom of a brilliant innocence.

After dinner Mrs. Pole and Miss Drake, each by a little work-table, settled themselves down to knit before the warmth of the peat fire, whilst the lamplight glimmered on rows of old gilded books, made folds of shine and shadow amongst the faded roses on the curtains, and slept on the larger blossoms of the old Axminster carpet. At Mrs. Pole's request Countess Shimna played a little on the piano; then she tried a verse of one of those French songs in which passion, sadness, and levity play at hide-and-seek amongst the cadences; but she stopped, saying that this evening she was not in good voice: and finally she and Pole settled themselves to a game of chess. "I would," she said to him in a low tone as they arranged their pieces, "if we were by ourselves, sing to you something else-a song I have just learnt."

They played almost in silence, and were so leisurely over their operations, that their game was far from finished when the clock struck half-past ten, and the butler entered with his tray of tumblers and bedroom candles. This was Mrs. Pole's invariable signal for retiring. She and Miss Drake raised each the lid of her work-table and committed her knitting to its tomb in a pendant bag below. Then, seeing that the chess-players were still busy, and were, as far as appearance went, much absorbed in their occupation, Mrs. Pole stooped down, and kissing Countess Shimna's hair, said,

"Don't get up or disturb yourselves. You, Reginald, will ring to have the lamps put out when you have finished."

The two antagonists, as soon as they were left alone, began to regard the chess-board with more intentness than ever. They had, however, forgotten whose was the next move. A word or two settled the matter, and then they were completely silent. In a few minutes, despite the obvious fact that their eyes had never strayed from the kings and pawns and castles, they showed signs of a further forgetfulness, which was of a less usual character. They both seemed to have forgotten the elementary rules of the game. At last Countess Shimna moved a castle diagonally.

"You can't do that," exclaimed Pole, laughing.

She laughed also. They abandoned the

pretence of playing. With a brusque movement she sprang up from her chair; and, looking over her shoulder at him, said,

"I am going to sing to you. You must listen your best, for I shall sing it very low. This is a silly little song. I saw it yesterday in a music shop; and in the evening I practised it. Its words, the shopman told me, were written by a local genius, and came out first in a corner of the Lyncombe paper. I bought it because it reminded me—well—of the scenery between this and Lyncombe."

She dropped her eyes, and just touching the keys of the piano, she sang softly into the following verses a significance not their own:—

"Spring is on land and sea, dear!

If you would woo me still,

Say how you'll live with me, dear.

You may promise me all you will.

"Spring is on heather and hill, dear!
Joy is on gorse and steep!
You may use my life as you will, dear,
For you never will make me weep.
Spring is on heather and hill.

"Summer is warm above me.

Think of our spring-time tryst.

Oh, how will you prove you love me?

You may do with me all you list.

Summer is warm above.

"Autumn comes with a sigh to me.
What! Are you near me yet?
Say, if you wish, 'Good-bye' to me.
Only forget, forget!
It is Autumn that sighs—not I.

"Winter is come: and deep, my friend,
Is its ice on my tears and blood.
You never will make me weep, my friend:
Ah, God, if you only could!"

When the song was ended, the singer looked up at her auditor with a laugh again in her eyes, and said, "Do you recognize the couleur locale?"

There was a low stool by the piano. He sank on it half kneeling. She started as if she would have risen, but the movement at once spent itself; and before either of them had spoken or taken count of time, her lips had settled on his, and her eye-lashes slept content upon her cheek. At last, rousing herself, she murmured caressingly in his ear,

"The day will come when you will have to 'forget—forget,' even if I do not tell you to do so. But meanwhile—meanwhile—

'Use my life as you will, dear, You never will make me weep.'

And now it is bed-time. Say, if you wish, good-bye to me! Indeed, you must say it, whether you wish or no."

She filled his dreams that night. She would not be driven out of them, no matter what qualities he might feel her to lack, or to possess; and the seal of sleep, when it touched him, touched him like Countess Shimna's lips.

The following morning he took her out for a walk. October was drawing near; but September to the last moment was keeping up a golden imitation of summer. They went by the wooded pathway that led to the home farm.

"Do you remember," he said, "what a storm there was on the day when we went here first?"

"That," she answered, "was the day when you got the telegram that told you—what? That you were going to be Prime Minister—wasn't it? Believe me it is much better to stay and be happy here. Look," she exclaimed, laughing; "how am I to cross this?"

A microscopic stream, obstructed by a dam of leaves, had made the ground swampy for a couple of yards in front of them; and in mimic embarrassment Countess Shimna halted. As a mere piece of colouring there was something in her that bewitched the

senses, standing there amongst the glitterings of sylvan gold and green. Her dress was of blue serge; but her soft cap was scarlet, and was fixed to her hair by a long pearl-headed pin; her gloves were grey; and her boots were brown like an autumnal oak-leaf. These spots of colour to Pole were like so many notes of music, celebrating the exotic daintiness of this presence that was now alone with him, and joining with the whisper of the woodland to tell him she was all his own.

"See," he said, "by the bank is a ledge that is quite dry; give me your hand, and I'll keep you from slipping. That's right—so. Now get a little higher. Now give me both your hands, and you can jump down quite easily."

"No," she said, "that's just what I can't do, unless you stand farther off."

He did not move, however; but still holding her hands, he looked up at her, and said, "As soon as you do jump down, I want to ask you a very practical question."

His voice was only half serious; but it was changed from what it just now had been. At any rate, she seemed to detect in it some meaning from which she shrank; for

shaking her head she said, "No, no—ask me nothing. Let us live for a little, and forget to question life."

"Don't," he retorted, laughing, "say 'No, no, no,' like that, before you are certain of the sort of question with which I am threatening you. I want to ask if you will come with my mother and me to London. My mother wishes it. I am asking you at her suggestion. There—the murder is out—the formidable question is asked; and now, if you are not the worse for it, jump down; and you and I will talk about it as we go along."

She seemed willing enough to listen, and he explained the whole plan to her. At last she said with a sigh, "You have conjured up before me such a pretty vision, and — Mr. Pole—if that is the name I am to call you by —such an unattainable one. Yes—unattainable. I wonder if I can tell you why. See, here is a bench. Let us sit down for a minute or two. I want to think how I can best explain my meaning."

She folded her hands on her lap, and for some time sat silent looking at them.

"What do you suppose," she said at last, "I have been thinking about all this while?

About the things I won't tell you—not about the things I will. I could tell you that my coming to London is impossible on account of my health, or because I want sea air, or because I have presently to rejoin my mother in the South. I may have to say this to Mrs. Pole, but I won't say it to you. To you I will say frankly that I cannot come to London because, for special reasons, I am in no mood for the world. I want to avoid, not seek it. Look me in the eyes, and tell me—can you believe that?"

She raised her fringe of eye-lashes, so as to enable him to do her bidding.

"Of course," he answered, with a gaze full of interest and interrogation, "here in this quiet life amongst ourselves, I can form no judgment of you. But certainly the day when we went over to Dulverton, you seemed to take to society as if you had been born and bred for it."

"Oh," she said, "that was amusing; but it was over and done with in an hour or two. Besides one's old habits survive one's old feelings. Yes. I was born in society. It has been round me all my life. I came out at seventeen at a ball in the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg. I shrink from the world

now because I have known the world so well."

"Most of us," said Pole, "have at times had the same shrinking. But if you met the world again—and the world under some new form—the feeling would pass at once. It is sure, indeed, to pass in time."

"Perhaps," she said. "So are most things. We shall all, if we live long enough. survive every feeling except regret. Ah, Mr. Pole-Mr. Reginald Pole-Reginald-I wonder very much if you have guessed one thing. Young as I am there is a certain story attaching to me. I am not like other girls. It is a story that I intend to tell you -but not to-day: you must let me wait till my visit is just ending. Meanwhile I will give your mother no definite answer. That will save discussion, and make our days pass more pleasantly. And meanwhile, too, let us both forget what I have been saying to you. Let both your secrets and mine be as though they had never been; and let these few days be a little happy island, in which all that we do or feel is cut off from the continent of consequences. Let me see how you take my proposition. You smile-your lips smile. Ah-and now

'Yes' is in your eyes. You need not make any other answer. Come—we will walk on."

She rose from the seat, and, laughing, took his hand, and made him rise also. Her influence mixed itself with the freshness of the golden day, and impregnated with the spell of womanhood the leaf-scented air around him. For both of them the rest of the morning turned into a child's holiday; and they went back to luncheon taking with them children's appetites. Countess Shimna thanked Mrs. Pole for the invitation to London, telling her that in a day or two she would know if she were able to accept it. "A good deal depended," she said, "on whether or no her mother was going, after all, to send her relation's little child to Lyncombe." But she certainly betrayed in neither 'her voice or manner, any trace of the quarrel with the world at which she had so lately hinted.

"Well," said Mrs. Pole, "we have you in our possession now; and I hope that here, at all events, you will stay with us as long as possible. Have you ever, Reginald, asked her if she cares for riding?"

"Indeed I do," she exclaimed, "for riding

in an open country! Ah, Poland is the place for riding. I have ridden there sometimes all day."

Mrs. Pole's suggestion opened for them a new excitement. "This afternoon," said Pole, "we will try our own open moor."

A message was sent without delay to the stables; and in a short half-hour the equestrians, mounted on Exmoor ponies, were slowly ascending from Glenlynn to the wild world above. At last they reached the summit, and the moorland rolled before them, a purple wilderness, out to the long horizon, with streaks of elastic turf stretching away from them amongst the heather.

"Now," said Pole, "for a gallop!" And off they both started.

"Ah," she exclaimed, as they paused at the brink of a hidden valley, "that was pure delight. A moment more and I shall have wings and fly."

"Down the hill!" cried Pole. And they dipped into a wild valley, which looked as if no one had entered it since the creation of the world. It was littered with rocks, and along it a stream came floating in lazy pools which were linked by purring or prattling rapids. The voice of the water alone dis-

turbed the silence; and the two adventurers felt themselves pressed together by the intense solitude. "At the head of this valley," said Pole, "there once was a robber's strong-hold. We shall not be able to get there this afternoon. In a mile or two we shall come to a sheep-track. We shall have to ride back by that." They found the track. It led them to the high ground again. The turf was good for trotting, and now and then for a gallop; and round them the scented wilderness sank and swelled and sank. Suddenly Countess Shimna checked herself, and broke into an exclamation. Below was a straggling village, with fields and some trees round it; and almost under her was a large dilapidated church. "It was there," said Pole, "that you and I first met; and Tristram Pole and his passions are lying there, under the pews and hassocks."

"Do you think so?" she said. "I fancy they may be still alive. There are more things than we suspect, which people when they die do not carry away with them."

They then descended to the village, and so trotted briskly home, following the road that had been taken by Miss Pole's funeral.

Glenlynn, when they reached it, seemed to be warm with welcome.

"I never realized till to-day," said Countess Shimna to Mrs. Pole, "what a lovely place this is. How delightful it is to be safe, and shut away from everything! Dear Mrs. Pole, this is far better than London."

"I," said Mrs. Pole, smiling, "certainly myself think so."

Countess Shimna and Pole that evening, true to the spirit of the compact made by them during their morning walk, avoided chess, as a game which might repeat their last night's experience, and jeopardize their present happiness, by leading them to face the cause of it. They therefore insisted on Mrs. Pole and Miss Drake joining them in a rubber of whist; and the time passed by with a sparkle of quiet entertainment, till the butler appeared as usual with his tray, his bottles, and his tumblers.

The drama of the day, however, was not yet entirely ended. The three ladies, having each sipped a little water, had said good night to Pole, leaving him alone behind them, when the door opened, and Countess Shimna re-appeared.

"I have come," she said, "for my fan and

my handkerchief. They must both of them be here somewhere."

"I am glad you forgot them," said Pole. "I will help you to find them presently. But I want first to say something which, I am sure, you will not object to. Come here by the fire. It will take a minute or two to say. Listen now-I have had a most delightful day with you: and I hope you observe how judiciously I choose my phrases. I hope for many like it: but in one way they must be a little different. I have work to do-work which I must attend to: so don't quite forget me if, for some hours each day, I shut myself up in my room, or am out with builders or with bailiffs. I pay you the compliment of thinking that you don't want to make a fool of me; and you would be making me a fool if you made me forget my duties."

"I quite understand," she said. "I like a man with a strong character."

"I think," he said, "you understand most things, and now listen to this. On looking over my letters I find that I shall, most probably, have to go away ten days hence, to see about my parliamentary election."

"And I," she replied, "may have to go even sooner."

"Well," he said, "let us not number our days. But whatever their number be, I want to tell you this—that you have made me happy already, and I am not going to ask why. Make the others equally happy, and I will still not ask—not till the days end. Shall I show you a proof of how sincere I am in saying this? I should like at this moment, Countess Shimna, to take you in my arms and kiss you. But I won't. I don't. I stand here decently by the chimney-piece."

"Hush-hush!" she said. "You must not speak like that. And yet I forgive you; for you make me say something that I want to say. You must not touch my lips again, till I go away-till this holiday is over-till I tell you everything. But I will not forbid you to remember that twice I have been less distant with you. Till I go, however, we are to live together like good comrades, who have a memory, if you like, which they never speak about, of something more than camaraderie." She opened her fan, pressed it against her face, and looking at him with laughing eyes over its coloured and glittering arc, she held her hand out to him, and said, "Now, mon ami, good night."

CHAPTER XIII.

POLE was as good as his word with regard to his own work. Whatever might be the effect on him of one woman's neglect, and the unanalyzed compensation he was receiving from the companionship and caresses of another, he did not suffer himself to be distracted from the duties which he had set himself to perform. His coming career as a politician entailed on him both study and correspondence; but his buildings, the walls of which had now risen above the ground, and the mass of local information which he had from the first determined to collect, at the present moment absorbed him even more than politics. Nor did this preoccupation with matters so entirely unconnected with herself do him any harm in the eyes of Countess Shimna, or in any way interfere with the pleasure and the development of their friendship. On the contrary, it increased both. She did, indeed, as she had told him, respect strength of character, much as many women respect the strength that is merely physical: whilst as for him, an experience which he had frequently undergone in London, now repeated itself, only in a more delicate form. The natural self-approval produced in him by his assiduous work, by the letters of applause and encouragement which he received from his official correspondents, by Mr. Godolphin's admiration of what he was doing on the Glenlynn estate, and the gratitude of several families whom he had already helped successfully—the self-approval produced in him by these causes operated once more, as a kind of absolution in advance, for any possible development in his relationship with his beautiful companion, which otherwise he might have been tempted to condemn.

"I have known," he said to himself, "what the love is which is religion. Let me play a little now with another love, which is its half-sister, and which comes to me here disguised as friendship, and looks at me laughing through a black velvet mask."

But as the days went on, the aspect of

things changed. More and more he came to realize how in Countess Shimna were all sorts of attractions, which were not only fascinating but endearing; and her powers of thought, her taste, and the extent of her reading, which had, on his first acquaintance with her, so much struck and surprised him, began to form between them a genuine intellectual link. Whenever she was not with him she passed her hours in the library, except when Mrs. Pole accepted of her assistance in the character of secretary. She renewed her acquaintance with Byron; she learnt many of Shelley's songs by heart; with remarkable quickness of comprehension she glanced through some books on science, and dipped into the pages of endless old French Memoirs. Between her and Pole, therefore, there was no lack of subjects for conversation; and they were never tempted. by any awkward or banal silence, to have recourse to the crudities of direct lovemaking. But a spirit of coquetterie, or perhaps something even more serious, lurked amongst her words and manner, flashing through them like quicksilver.

They continued their rides; and he saw her, in a certain limited fashion, begin to show some interest in his study of the neighbouring poor. Lonely though the country was, their way would often take them through one or other of the primitive and scattered villages. These, by this time, were all well known to Pole, who had studied the plans of each on his six-inch ordnance map, and had made elaborate notes as to the condition of the inhabitants of the cottages. Such being the case, he would now frequently stop at one door or another, either to make some fresh inquiry, or proffer some kind assistance; and Countess Shimna, who would wait for him with a good temper that was inexhaustible, naturally elicited accounts of what he was either doing or hoping to do. Every time that he issued from some rude cottage kitchen, with its atmosphere of faint peat smoke, through which dressers and mugs glimmered, the sight of his companion sent a fresh thrill through his imagination, as he found her outside, displaying to the ragged village street a habit and figure which invariably made him feel as if some magician had deposited her there, fresh from the Bois in Paris. And the brilliant eyes of this vision would smile at him, a faint, foreign perfume would steal through the air to him from her handkerchief; and he and she would gallop home together between the vast horizons, which seemed as if they held within their circle no other human beings.

Of his own interests, however, those connected with his social and philanthropic schemes were the ones in which she seemed least able to share. She could understand the idea of helping some individual sufferer; but the need or the possibility of any organized beneficence towards the poor, she understood very dimly. For her the world was divided into serfs and nobles; a Nihilist was a noble disregarded, not a peasant oppressed. The lot of the people, for her, was like the surface of the Steppes of Russia—equally natural and unchanging. This was no symptom of any hardness of heart in her. On the contrary, the gardeners at Glenlynn, and the old women who weeded the walks, had never in their lives seen any one as captivating as Countess Shimna. By the old women especially she would stand and talk, questioning them about their work, their age, their ailments, their clothes, their food, and their husbands; sometimes taking

their spades from them and doing a little work herself; and giving them, when she went away, a pat on their bent backs, as though they had been domestic animals who attracted her, and with whom she loved to play. One morning, indeed, she surprised Pole and his mother by producing a number of boxes, come by the parcels post, with yards of ribbon in them as presents for the old women, and an assortment of brilliant neckties for the delectation of the male gardeners.

The same goodness of disposition which showed itself in this little act, showed itself also in her appreciation—instinctive and almost unconscious-of goodness and of sincerity in others; and this, as Pole realized, was all the more remarkable, because her sense of the ridiculous was acute to an extreme degree. To some men nothing in a woman, to whom they are attracted otherwise, does more to enhance her charm than a sense of the ridiculous such as this, especially when free, as in Countess Shimna's case, of any personal maliciousness; and never had Pole felt her personality more delightful than he did when one evening, towards the end of her visit, the dinner-table at Glenlynn was enlivened by the presence of three guests—Mr. and Mrs. Godolphin, and their son, who had just done with Harrow.

Countess Shimna had seen them before for a few moments; but never before had she had so clear an opportunity of watching them. At every little oddity in their manner her eyes brimmed with amusement; but an amusement that to them had the happy aspect of appreciation. For Mr. Godolphin indeed she evinced an instinctive sympathy which delighted him to such a degree, that his manner, generally so majestic, assumed at moments the graces of a chaste flirtation; while as for the boy, with his cheeks embrowned by the cricketfield, he fell so deeply in love with her, that he begged, in a broken whisper, for the head of a rose which fell on the carpet from her dress, and committed it with an adoring glance to some recess between his heart and waistcoat.

"I hope, Countess," said Mr. Godolphin at parting, "that you will honour us one day by coming over to luncheon, and seeing the interior of a quiet English parsonage."

"Mrs. Pole," cried his wife, who, voluble

though she naturally was, was too shy to address the brilliant stranger directly, "do, I beg of you, bring the Countess over, if she won't think our house too humble a place to come to."

Countess Shimna blushed scarlet. "Dear Mrs. Pole," she exclaimed, as if to bury this last speech, "do let us go. I have always been told, Mrs. Godolphin, that many of the English clergy, with their gardens and fields and houses, are far greater people than many continental bishops."

Mrs. Godolphin's face rippled into a web of smiles; and her husband, stroking his beard, and laughing with a deprecating complacency, said: "I'm afraid, Countess, you'll find, when you come to see us, that I'm a very humble minister of the Catholic Church in England. Mrs. Pole," he continued, "no time like the present. Suppose you bring the Countess the day after tomorrow."

This was arranged; and far into the silent night Mrs. Godolphin arrested her lord's incipient slumbers with broken conversation about the forthcoming banquet, which she wished, as she expressed it, to make "nice and French for the Countess." It is probable indeed that she would not have slept till morning, if Mr. Godolphin had not suddenly remembered an album containing mementoes of a tour taken by them on the Continent; and in this volume, he reminded her, were the menus of some hotel déjeuners.

"Dear Sunderland," cried his wife across the bed-clothes, "capital. We shall not want soup. We will have French names on the cards."

The meal, when the time came, was a delight and pride to the hostess. It actually suggested to more persons than one the fare of a Rhine steamer, or a large table-d'hôte in Switzerland; and the finishing touch was put to it by Mr. Godolphin, who, when coffee came, leaned towards his foreign guest and asked her, with a playful obsequiousness, if she would "have a chasse." When she said that she would, in the quietest way imaginable, he was a little taken aback, as the brandy was locked up in the cupboard. But he felt that, though he had failed in a witticism, he had succeeded as a man of the world; and having produced the bottle, he administered a homœopathic dose to her.

As they were passing out of the room, his wife, who had watched this transaction,

said to him in admiring whisper, "Dear Sunderland, I believe you know everything."

"Eh, mother," laughed Mr. Godolphin softly. "You do, do you?" And he chucked her gently under the chin.

This little conjugal idyll was observed and appreciated by Countess Shimna. It increased the good will with which she regarded her host and hostess; and when the son, in the drawing-room brought her a rose to replace her own, she flushed the boy with happiness by asking him to pin it into her jacket. Then presently began the great process of sight-seeing, which included the best bedrooms, the stables, and some fine Alderney cows, and ended with Mr. Godolphin's pushing his church door open, and admitting Countess Shimna to a sight of his blue and crimson organ, his lacetrimmed altar, and his row of altar candlesticks.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, "it is almost like one of our own churches!"

No human words could have pleased Mr. Godolphin better. He swelled as though a cubit had been added to his patriarchal stature; and, smiling down on this daughter of the Roman fold, he said to her, "The

Protestants of England have given up burning their Catholic brethren; but there are many of them in this country who, if they only had their way, would be too delighted to tie me to a stake in Lyncombe." He had at first regretted that Countess Shimna was not, like himself, an Anglican; but the wish died a natural death: for, if she had been, he never could have received from her so weighty and so gratifying a compliment. To all concerned the day was a great success, and the memories which the Glenlynn party took away with them were as pleasant, though hardly the same, as those which they left behind.

When they reached home, however, a certain incident occurred which somewhat disturbed for Pole the tenor of these enchanted days. Having handed Countess Shimna a letter for her which was lying on the hall table, he found two for himself. One of these was from the Conservative agent at Windsor; the upshot of it being that he would have to leave Glenlynn somewhat earlier than he had anticipated. This piece of news annoyed him; still he bore it with resignation. But what moved him far more was the other letter, though it contained

no news at all, except such as was connected with what seemed a very commonplace question. "I have heard nothing from you for so long," the letter ran, "that I feel quite shy of writing to you; but perhaps you will be kind, and tell me, or find out for me, what is the line of steamers to which *The Arctic* belongs. It belongs to a new service, between America and Milford Haven, which begins running some time in November. If it is not too much trouble to you, will you write and tell Pansy Masters."

On seeing the writing he had taken the letter into his bedroom; and as he was opening the envelope his heart had palpitated painfully. But when he had done reading it, he threw himself into a chair, and with his hand pressed against his eyes, he remained there almost motionless in a long reverie of disappointment, which had hardly in it any distinct thought. It was nothing indeed but a desolate and almost drowsy pain: and when his servant entered to arrange his things for dinner, he felt he had been roused from some dream, the memory of which was clinging to him like a chill.

Countess Shimna on the contrary at dinner seemed more animated than usual; and

by-and-by succeeded in restoring him to his previous spirits. Any one, however, who had set himself to watch her carefully, would have noticed occasional signs in her of some abstraction of mind, due to some hidden happiness, the source of which was elsewhere. Mrs. Pole and Miss Drake in the evening were both too tired for cards; and it thus came about that Pole and Countess Shimna were once more left to a tête-à-tête at the chess-board.

Pole till now had not observed the change in her; but he presently saw her to be playing in such a reckless way that he began to suspect her of being either bored or pre-occupied. "Perhaps," he said presently, "you would sooner not go on. Do you see the position in which you have put your queen?"

His words appeared to rouse her. She glanced furtively at the clock; and answered him: "No, no, I want to go on particularly. How stupid I was! Do let me have that back again." She now made her moves with what seemed to be extreme deliberation, and although her play showed few signs of improvement, she postponed her defeat till nearly half-past ten. "Now," she exclaimed

with a vivacity which suprised her opponent, "one game more. Let me see if I can't beat you."

Pole assented, and a second game began. It had not proceeded far before the butler and the tray entered; and Mrs. Pole and Miss Drake rose with their accustomed regularity. "Ah," said Mrs. Pole to the players, "I see you have not done."

Countess Shimna laughed. "No," she replied; "this is a second game. Dear Mrs. Pole, don't let me keep you up. I am having my revenge. You must allow me to finish it."

"It is your move," said Pole, when the two elders had departed.

She laid her hand for a moment on one of the ivory pieces; but then, instead of playing, she sat back in her chair. "I wanted," she said, "to speak to you. I can do so now. I am a little cold. Let us go over to the fire."

They did as she suggested, and stood on the hearthrug facing each other. The letter received by him before dinner, had left a chill in his heart, which persisted like a physical chill through whatever warmth had followed it. It was a chill he dared not think of: and At last she forced herself away from him, so far as to allow herself to speak. "Do you remember," she said, "one thing which I told you—that you were not to kiss me again till the time had come for me to be going? Well, I must go to-morrow. It was this that I wished to say."

"Go!" he exclaimed. "But why? I must go soon myself. Cannot you wait till then? And meanwhile, how much I should have to say to you!"

She shifted her position a little, and leaned her head against his shoulder, beginning to play meanwhile with one of his coat-buttons. Her self-abandonment had all the grace of self-possession. In every movement there was a certain dainty dignity—even in her hand, as it busied itself with its present babyish occupation.

"I cannot wait," she said, "and I can listen to nothing more from you. You ask me why I must go. I shall tell you before long. The immediate reason is that the little child-relation which I mentioned, comes to Lyncombe to-morrow; and I have promised my mother to do my best for it. That is enough to account for my abrupt departure to your mother. But to you by-and-by I

shall have something very different to say. Come and see me at Lyncombe, the day after to-morrow; and I will say it then. Do you remember some time ago I spoke to you of a coming happiness, announced to me in a letter which I received? Well-that happiness is very near me now-a kind of happiness that you never would have imagined was in my reach. Why do you start away from me, as if I had shocked you, or as if you doubted me? Did not I tell you before that this is no happiness you need be jealous of? When you know what it is, you will understand many things. It may," she said, looking up at him, "take me far away soon; but it has not taken me even away from this hearthrug yet." He felt, as she spoke, her hold on his arms tighten. "Forget to-morrow," "Hold me a little whilst you she said. can ! "

For a few seconds they remained like figures fashioned out of wax. Then Pole was aware that her arm was round his neck once more; and the flower of her face was his, in all its unfolded petals.

When next she spoke she was standing a pace away from him. She was perfectly self-possessed — mistress, as usual, of her

own grace and beauty. "You will, perhaps," she said, "like me the worse for this; but not for the happiness that will come between this and us. For that you will like me better."

CHAPTER XIV.

SHE went, as she had said. He offered to drive into Lyncombe with her; but for some reason or other she begged him not to do so. She left him restless with a fever so strange to him that he hardly knew himself; and he found himself, for a wonder, incapable of any kind of work. One letter he wrote, indeed, the address of which was "Lady Pryce-Masters;" but it was no longer than hers had been. He promised to get her the information, which she required, about the steamer; and he added, "As you say, it was indeed long since I had heard from you." But that was all. "I suppose," he said to himself, "she is interested in this steamer because her husband intends returning in it." Then, with a certain impatience, he thrust the subject out of his head; and he shrank from walking in the garden, or on any of the cliff-side paths, lest, in looking at

the sea, he should feel the thought assaulting him, that somewhere behind the sea-line was this woman to whom he now was nothing. He chose instead some of the wooded slopes, where he and Countess Shimna had many a time scrambled, where her dainty syllables seemed to have left crystal echoes, and where the perfume of her presence mixed itself with that of the whispering pines.

At length the moment came, after luncheon the following day, when he might, without undue precipitation, set out for Lyncombe to rejoin her. The hour she had mentioned was five o'clock; and he thought with some impatience of how short would be the utmost time which, since he must return for dinner, would be thus allowed for their interview. He accordingly reached her door, punctually as the hour was striking; and rang the bell with a vigour which ought to have informed the household that he was resolved not to lose a moment in unnecessary waiting there on the gravel.

A foreign-looking elderly woman soon made her appearance, who seemed to understand neither English, French, nor German; though she evidently recognized Pole as an expected visitor; for she took him across a little lobby, decorated with shells and coral, and, without announcing his name, admitted him to a small drawing-room. He looked about him eagerly; but he saw that the room was empty; and so, to beguile the time, he began indolently to examine it. The cottage was comparatively old-one of the earliest of the houses that made Lyncombe more than a fishing-village. The drawingroom opened on a verandah, thatched, and hung with creepers; and the furniture, though worn with use, was better than what is usual in lodging-houses; and indeed it had about it a suggestion of bygone honeymoons. But what principally interested Pole, were the various exotic objects, with which it had now been filled, obviously by its present occupant. On some of the chairs were pieces of embroidered oriental silk; on a chipped rosewood table was a smart Russia leather writing-case, and a little glittering litter of smelling-bottles, and silver ornaments. There were a number of books. some of them bound beautifully in morocco of pale shades, and ornamented with gilt monograms; others were in vellum, which lit up the whole room; whilst here and

there, glittering with satin and tinsel, were boxes of Parisian bon-bons; and pots of flowers were standing in some baskets of gilded wicker-work, which at some Parisian Easter must have originally been bonbonières also. Countess Shimna's family, it was evident, took such care of her that even in a lodging they surrounded her with the breath of luxury. The room, thought Pole, suggested the occupancy of one who had rarely lived between walls not gilded or hung with silk. A hand-mirror, in silver, was on one of the small tables; and lying beside it was a copy of Dante's Purgatorio.

For some time his examination of these details interested him; but her continued absence gradually made him impatient; and finally, when a carriage clock musically chimed the quarter, he began to doubt whether the servant could have informed her mistress of his arrival. He went to the window, which was open; he stepped out into the verandah; he looked about him, pretending to himself to be interested in the view; then he returned to the room, anxious, perplexed, and restless. At last he heard voices. He had been sitting, and he sprang up at the sound, straining his ears to

distinguish where they came from. Whilst thus engrossed, he was startled by Countess Shimna's voice quite close to him. She had entered the room through a pair of dim chintz curtains, which he now saw gave admission to some other room beyond. She was dressed in blue, with a dainty little sailor's hat. Her eyes were shining, her cheeks were like flushed porcelain.

"Ah," she said, "have I kept you? Will you forgive me? I could not help it. You will see in a minute or two what I mean by that. And now listen," she went on, coming closer to him, and holding him by his coat as she spoke, "I believe that in some men's eyes, mystery gives charm to a woman's character, just as powder very possibly in their eyes gives charm to a woman's complexion. What I am going to do now is to brush my powder off. Wait here one minute more, and come to me through these curtains, when I call to you."

She disappeared as she had come; and Pole again heard voices, both of them hushed and gentle; and then he heard a closing door. "Will you come?" said Countess Shimna's voice to him; and he penetrated to the room within. At first he saw nothing

as the result of all this mystery, except the fact that she had the child, of which she had spoken, in her arms: and his only wonder was that she knew so well how to hold it. But a moment later he was enlightened. Bending down over the little sleeping face, she laid her lips on it with the low inarticulate murmur, which is produced by the passion of one sole relationship. A nerve in Pole's memory thrilled and vibrated at the sound. He looked at her without uttering a word. It seemed to him that they were silent both of them, for an indefinite time. In reality not many seconds elapsed before she found her voice.

"I see," she said, "that my secret surprises you; but I see in your face that you have divined it. I felt when I first met you—though the feeling then was vague—that you knew the deep things of life. Yes—here is my happiness—here is my secret in my arms. I sometimes feel that I shall never enjoy anything else. This little thing—this wonderful little thing—is my own. She is called Thyrza."

Pole was silent, not knowing what to say. "Well," she resumed, "the next question is, What do you think of me? Shut that door.

Thank you. Now, sit down there." And she, as she spoke, reseated herself. "I will give you, in very few words, the means of forming a judgment."

Her face had become quite calm, and there was in it, as she now looked at him, a return of that soft brilliance which had so often provoked his admiration.

"My story is this," she said, speaking in a quiet, level voice. "Less than two years ago I was married. Four months before the birth of this little creature, it was discovered that my husband had another wife alive. Some time or other I can tell you more particulars; but these bare facts will show you my situation. I ought to add that it has this redeeming feature - It has dissolved a marriage which I shudder even now to remember, and which would have made my life even a greater ruin than it is. Don't speak yet. I have a few things more to say. My little child is not supposed to be mine. My mother, who is a clever woman, managed everything wonderfully. It is supposed to be the child of a cousin of ours who died: and my mother gives out that she herself has undertaken the charge of it from kindness. It was her arrangement that it should be brought

here, so that I might have it for a time without exciting observation. That is the reason of our coming to Lyncombe, and of my being left here. I should add, that the man I was married to, believed his wife to be dead. She was in hiding for political reasons; but her story is neither here nor there. And," she went on, hesitating, "there is another particular I must mention. My husband was summoned to St. Petersburg the day after we were married. mother's story is that he had to leave me at the church door. She is accustomed to thank heaven for this fortunate circumstance. and most of the people who think anything about the subject believe her. The marriage has been annulled. I don't feel somehow that that makes much difference. Wellwhat do you think of me?"

Pole could not speak. He did all that he could do. He came to her side, kneeled down by her, and raising her hand, kissed it. The grave respect of the action said more than any protestations; and the young mother thanked him by the expression of her face as she turned to him; but far more by the quietness with which, he remaining close to her, she continued to watch her child.

In her downcast eyes light hung like dewdrops. "Look at it!" she said, "just look!" Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it wonderful? Bone of my bone—flesh of my own flesh!" and she gently caressed the wax of its sleeping cheeks.

For a moment or two longer Pole watched by her in silence; and then leaning nearer to her, he said, whispering in her ear, "I like you better now than ever I did before—far, far better."

The slight movement he had made woke the child, who uttered a small cry.

"See," said its mother to Pole half sadly, half playfully, "you have summoned her back to sorrow. Open the door, and call upstairs for Anna, will you? Anna is one of the nurses. She must take my baby now."

An old woman presently entered the room, who received the child, smiling over it with withered lips.

"Take it, it's a good little thing," said Countess Shimna to her, with a kindly carelessness. "It has hardly cried at all. I have fallen in love with it already. Do you see?" she went on, when she and Pole were alone together, "I must not seem too fond even of my own baby. Perhaps," she continued,

"you understand now why I have no heart for London, and why I——" she stopped, as though it were vain to finish the sentence.

With an abrupt gentleness Pole took her by the arm. "Come," he said, "sit down again. You have talked to me thus far. Now let me talk to you. Bear with me a moment. I want to collect my words."

During the last ten minutes a change had come over him with regard to her. Through her extraordinarily attractive qualities he had, during her visit at Glenlynn, been seeing day by day lovable qualities show themselves: but till now there had been a something wanting-some depth and sanctity of nature, which he had known in another woman, but till now he had missed in her. At last, so he said to himself, he had found it in her—she possessed this also. He was persuaded indeed that one woman had deceived the faith he had put in her: but this experience, far from rendering him cynical, had only made him the more anxious to believe: and his heart now opened itself to Countess Shimna with a trust that was at least generous.

"You could not," he began presently, "have found in the whole world a better

person than myself, to whom you might tell your secret. I don't say this as a compliment to my own trustworthiness, or as a means of making love to you. If I want to make love to you, my friend, I can do so in other ways. What I mean to tell you is, that I have a secret too. When I saw that little bundle of white clothes lying between your breast and arms, I knew that to you it was the wonder of all wonders - the unimaginable mystery of existence, still shining into your eyes with newness - because I have seen such a burden in the arms of another woman, and both our lives were mixed in it. It is far away from me now. Its mother—his mother—is tired of me. That little life I speak of—he lives in an old castle, and plays in an untidy garden. I think about him so often, and wonder what he is doing. I wonder all sorts of little things about him-things too silly to tell you:—and nobody tells me anything. Listen now!-You can never be a mother to my first-born. Will you let me be a father to yours?"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, "oh, hush! hush! hush! Please do not talk like that! I can never, never listen to it. I had a

husband once—a husband for eighteen hours. He was seven feet high—a General. People said that he had the bearing of a hero. I have seen his face like a lantern, with the monstrous appetites of an animal in it. Oh," she said, shuddering, "cannot we sing and play among the flowers and in the sunshine as we have done? Must all that be over?"

She rose, and stood before Pole, with a glimmer of returning gaiety; and lightly stroked his cheek, as a little marquise in powder might have stroked on a painted screen the cheek of a kneeling shepherd. Men are composite creatures. Without his relinquishing one of his serious thoughts about her, Pole's temperament and manner responded to her change of mood.

"You forbid me a certain subject," he said. "Very well then—I will not talk of it. But I give you warning, I am not going to forget it. I shall lock it up in a jewel-case, with a lining of soft velvet; and one day or other, with your leave, I shall take it out again. Countess Shimna, do you hear that?"

"Come," she said, with a pout of her halfsmiling lips, "come into the garden, and help me to pick some flowers. Will you have a chocolate? I don't often eat them myself, but my mother and Prince Bobrovski are never tired of sucking them. Here—take one; and now let us come out."

"There is," said Pole presently, "one serious matter—not the one that is forbidden, but another—which we have still to talk about; and that is the question of your coming to London with us. You have given my mother, I believe, no definite answer."

"I thought," she said, "that before definitely refusing, I would explain things all to you, so that you would understand my refusal."

"Now that I know all," said Pole, "I should understand it less than ever. I will find a lodging for your child. My mother won't go for three weeks or so. Everything will be quite easy."

Her expression was half relenting. "How could I?" she answered. "I may meet the world again some day. I don't think I could now."

"Well," he said, "I won't urge you more to-day. You know that I go to London myself almost at once. Think the matter over, Shimna. Tell me you will do that;

and before I leave Glenlynn, say 'Yes' to my mother."

"I will say 'Yes' to you," she replied, "meaning that I will think it over. And now, good-bye for the moment, else you will be late for dinner. Adieu!" she said on the doorstep.

"Adieu!" he answered. "Je t'aime."

CHAPTER XV.

A FEW weeks later Mrs. Pole was saying to her son, "Here is a letter, which has, at all events, the merit of being characteristic." And she handed him a mauve envelope, adorned with a huge gold coronet.

They were seated together at breakfast, in a panelled and somewhat dingy room, containing three portraits said to be by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The walls were lined by a serried row of chairs, whose leather betrayed the friction of many generations of diners. At one end were two windows, darkened with old rep curtains; and at the opposite end a pair of Corinthian columns formed an alcove where a great mahogany side-board reposed its respectable bulk in a dim sanctuary of shadows. Such was the dining-room of Lord Wargrave's house in Brook Street—a house which had hardly been changed since it was built in the last

century, except by having been refurnished shortly before the battle of Waterloo, and having acquired unintended lines through the sinking of its floors and ceilings. It had, moreover, another speciality which it certainly did not start with. It was now beyond comparison the dirtiest house in the neighbourhood. Lord Wargrave's father had inherited it from an uncle, its original builder; and in Lord Wargrave's eyes its condition was a distinction as well as an economy. "In a London house nowadays," he was very fond of observing, "four generations of family dirt is the only decoration that money cannot buy."

Pole and his mother had arrived there two days ago; and the bags, books, and boxes which stood on some of the chairs, showed that the new tenants were but half settled in their quarters.

"I suppose," Mrs. Pole continued, as her son read the letter, "we shall have to ask her to dinner, or offer her some civility. I'm glad, at any rate, that she's pleased at our taking charge of Shimna; and there must be something good in her, in spite of her odd ways, since she takes so much interest in this poor little pretty baby, and spends—for the

spending must be hers—so much money upon it."

Pole meanwhile had been reading the following letter:—

"My Dear Augusta—for I suppose a cousin may call you by your nom de baptême-how shall I ever thank you for all you have done, not only for Shimna, but for a very little relation of ours, who is too young at present to be very interesting personally? I could not take the little darling about with me; and it would have been too distressing to have left it alone with nurses. You may readily believe then, how delighted I was when my daughter-herself too delicate to travelbegged to be allowed to have it with her. But, on the other hand, except in a very quiet place, my daughter could hardly have been left alone either; and quiet places are aptare they not?—to be triste. Lyncombe would have been triste. Any place would have been in which Shimna could have been left. But in London, under your care she can be happy -she can keep her spirits, and perform at the same time those charming and tender duties with which, out of the goodness of her heart, she has charged herself. And all this is owing to you. How many thousands of thanks must I pay you before you are paid in full, dear Augusta—kind kinswoman? Ah! I can neither count nor pay them. But allow me, while I am here—and that is for a few days only—to call and renew my acquaintance with you, and at least thank you in person, though I never can thank you fully. To do so will be indeed pleasure to your very grateful cousin,

"Yolande O'Keefe.

"Shimna tells me," continued the writer in a postscript, "that she joins you to-morrow or next day."

"If Lord Wargrave sticks to what he told you in his note," said Pole, "he will be here by two o'clock, from Shropshire. Let us ask the Countess to luncheon, and he shall get some friends to meet her. And now, what can this be?" he exclaimed—"what exceedingly early visitor?" For as he spoke a noisy rattle of wheels came to an abrupt cessation immediately outside the windows; and, rising from his seat, he saw above the wire blind the ruddy disc of a hackney cabman's face, motionless with the gleams of morning on it, and backed by a

pile of luggage. Presently the bell was rung with an imperious vigour, which made a bell-wire rustle and whisper along the cornice: and Pole, approaching the window, saw Lord Wargrave's servant busy in extracting his master from the depths of a four-wheel cab. Lord Wargrave emerged, like a portrait stepping out of its frame, his figure swelled as it seemed, by several layers of overcoats, and his eyes and his mouth just showing themselves between a muffler and a woollen cap.

"Where in the world can he have come from?" said Mrs. Pole, laughing, for she, too, by this time, was contemplating her landlord's advent. "He looks as if he'd been travelling for forty-eight hours, at least."

She had not long to wait for her question to receive its answer. A moment later Lord Wargrave was in the dining-room doorway, his scanty hair ruffled by the removal of his head-gear, but his person not yet divested of any of its other accourrements.

"My dear Augusta, God bless you," he said; and before Mrs. Pole had had time to collect her faculties, his hand was on her shoulder, and he had aimed a kiss at her cheek, which, without his seeming to notice it, only hit the air.

"Reginald, my dear, how are you? No, no, no! What is it you're fumbling at? The other one first; not that one."

This was addressed to his servant, whom he had, by a shrug of his shoulders and a backward bend of his body, silently ordered to free him of his superfluous garments.

"Now," he resumed, when he was reduced to his natural dimensions, "now, Augusta," and he fixed an appraising eye on the table, "I think I am ready for something in the way of breakfast."

"Everything's cold," said Mrs. Pole in dismayed accents. "We had no idea you'd be here before luncheon. Wouldn't you like to dress first, and let us have something fresh got for you?"

This suggestion Lord Wargave did not even condescend to notice.

"A chair," he grunted to his servant. "What have we here? Sausages! Reginald, I think I'll have one of those little fish as well, and—ah! what's this? The grilled bone of a chicken. I only," he said presently, "left Paris at nine o'clock last night. The train was late by three hours, at least. I never enjoyed the inconvenience of unpunctuality better. My dear old friend, the

Chairman of the Dover Railway, was sharing it, on the seat next mine."

"Paris!" exclaimed Mrs. Pole. "You were in Shropshire when you last wrote to me. How many nights running do you ever sleep in the same bed?"

Lord Wargrave answered this question by a momentary glance at Pole, which gleamed with nebulous innuendo. And then, turning to Mrs. Pole, said, with an easy gravity, as if he were mentioning the most common of daily incidents,

- "I had an engagement to dine with the President of the French Republic. He's the most ferocious Radical in Europe, with incomparably the best cook. I was specially asked that I might meet the newest Academician."
- "Do you mean," said Mrs. Pole, "the man who writes those disgusting novels?"
- "He's quite the most delightful man," said Lord Wargrave in unruffled tones, "the most tender, the wittiest, the most delicate man in conversation I've ever met since the death of the late Bishop of Aylesbury."
- "Your letters, my Lord," said his servant; and in the space of tablecloth close to him, which happened to be freest from bread

crumbs and broken crusts, a pile of envelopes was deposited as big as five packs of cards.

"That reminds me," said Mrs. Pole, "here is another communication for you. It's really written to me, but we mean it to be for you. We want you to entertain Countess O'Keefe at luncheon."

"Certainly," said Lord Wargrave as he read the Countess's letter. "And the beautiful young lady comes to-morrow, or the day after? Capital—capital! I'll see about the lunch this morning."

He then turned to his letters, and having extracted them from their envelopes with as much dexterity as a kitchen-maid shells peas, he laid on one side a little heap of cards and invitations, and stuffed the rest carelessly into one of his baggy pockets.

"I told you, my dear Reginald," he said, we should have not only a session but a season. As soon as I've done dressing come into my room and let me talk to you."

Half an hour later, in response to this invitation, Pole knocked at Lord Wargrave's door; and entering found the carpet littered with clothes and towels, and Lord Wargrave standing amongst them illuminated by a clean shirt.

"Sit down there," said Lord Wargrave, as, with chin well in the air, he was struggling to tug a noose of black necktie into something that might pass muster as a bow. "For the last few days I've not seen the English papers. Tell me about your own affairs. Your election, I suppose, is over."

"Yes," said Pole, "there was no second nomination, and my constituency has given birth to its member without a single pang of parturition. I have had, however, to be in London, hard at work for the past three weeks: and I think that by this time I am beginning to know my business."

"Well," said Lord Wargrave, "you'll take your seat to-morrow. I shall be there to witness the great event. I wish our fascinating young lady could have seen you enter the lists."

Pole replied that it was doubtful if she would reach London before Friday.

"Never mind, then," said Lord Wargrave, "she shall hear you make your maiden speech. We'll ask the mother for Sunday. I'll get a few members of the Corps Diplomatique to meet her, and some pleasant women; though that will be more difficult. When a woman like our Countess has such hair and such a

cousin Bobrovski, of the women to whom she would be civil, there are only two sorts—in this country at least—who would be civil to her in return—those who stick at nothing, and those who know nothing. The gay ladies, I think, would hardly be agreeable to your mother; so I'll get, if I can, an old Catholic Marchioness, a Catholic Marchioness with a plain Catholic daughter. And as for Countess Shimna, I've a box for the L—Theatre. The ticket is just come, and you and I and your mother will take her on Saturday night."

It was not till Saturday, so it proved, that Countess Shimna would arrive; and Lord Wargrave meanwhile began to busy himself with further schemes for her entertainment. All that afternoon he was running over in his mind various houses to which he would take her, and in which he would acquire himself a fresh importance because he did so. The thought of her gave to life a new social zest. The following day brought to him an excitement almost equally gratifying. He saw his protégé take his seat in the House of Commons; and he enjoyed the cheering with which the new member was greeted quite as much as if he had been himself its

object. One thing only in any way chilled his satisfaction; and this, as it happened, was his protégé's own demeanour.

"My dear Reginald," he said to Pole next day, "to look at your face you might have been in office for twenty years, and been learning how little an Under-Secretary can do, instead of dreaming of how much."

"If," replied Pole, "I have any qualifications for my present office at all, it is that I know life too well to dream about it."

"You ought to dream a little," said Lord Wargrave. "Every statesman with any genius should. All actual improvements have been the children of impossible hopes. However," he added, "the same may be said of the worst failures also; so the nation, perhaps, would be right in congratulating you on your philosophy."

That evening Lord Wargrave, on coming back from his club, was met in the hall by Mrs. Pole, who was dressed for dinner, and who told him that Countess Shimna had arrived, and was already preparing herself for the theatre. "And you," she said, "ought to be dressing too: for you specially impressed on me that we were to dine at seven punctually."

Lord Wargrave's toilet never consumed much time; and on the present occasion he was even more rapid than usual. Indeed, such was his eagerness to be again in Countess Shimna's presence that he paid her the homage, which was hardly obtrusive in its character, of not prolonging his preparations by adorning himself with a fresh shirt. When he entered the drawing-room his expectations were even more than satisfied. If Countess Shimna had shone amongst the faded furniture of Glenlynn, her brilliance was even greater with the Brook Street drawing-room for a background, especially as now she seemed to Lord Wargrave's eyes like a butterfly whose wings were palpitating for flight into its natural element. The quiet of her dress was, in every pleat and fold, full of worldly knowledge of the exact fitness of things; whilst her hair had that finished neatness which, classic as well as modern, makes Greek beauty immortal in the statuettes of Tanagra. A vision of the future flashed upon Lord Wargrave in a moment. He saw this brilliant fairy the heroine of a hundred drawing-rooms; he saw new social light irradiating himself as her guardian; he saw cards for a hundred dinners, to which

he would be begged to bring her; and the generous impulses of youth were actually so far rekindled in him that he experienced a distinct resentment against the obvious necessities of the situation when the arm that rested on his, as he went down to the dining-room, was not Countess Shimna's, but Mrs. Pole's. At the theatre, indeed, he took fate into his own hands; and no sooner were the party inside the glass doors of the building than, frankly leaving Mrs. Pole to the dutiful escort of her son, he tucked Countess Shimna's black-gloved arm under his elbow, and hurried her off with him in her rose-coloured opera cloak, proud of the glances that witnessed its intimate proximity to himself. His feelings, however, were by no means of such a nature as to interfere with the pleasure he from time to time received on observing how Countess Shimna would instinctively turn to Pole, and her eyes say some silent word to him with their wet. velvety heart's-ease. It was possibly with a generous wish of facilitating this interesting by-play that Lord Wargrave managed to engross so much of the front part of the box, that Pole was obliged to content himself with the land of shadows behind into which

any number of glances might be sent with complete security. But whatever might have prompted this arrangement, Lord Wargrave was happy in the results of it. The gas lamps which clustered close to the box exhibited himself and his neighbour centred in a common halo. As he scanned the house between the acts, he swelled with the proud consciousness that a growing number of operaglasses were converging in his direction; and whenever he felt himself to be specially under the public gaze he would murmur some confidential observation into Countess Shimna's ear, that the mystified world might see how the unknown beauty smiled at him.

Such was Countess Shimna's first evening in London; and Pole, who had not seen her for more than three weeks, was pleased to observe, when they came home from their dissipation, both in the brilliant sparkle in her eyes, and the tint of enjoyment upon her cheeks, signs that she was being reconciled to the world, either by time or by the world itself—and if to the world, he thought, to the idea of marriage also.

The incidents of next day's luncheon party, which Lord Wargrave had duly organized, confirmed him in this opinion. The first

guests to arrive were Lord Wargrave's Catholic Marchioness, old Lady Fermanagh, with her daughter Lady Editha O'Malley, the one lined with wrinkles and tottering in limp silks; the other erectly dowdy, and wearing a gentle smile, which seemed to say to the fashionable world in general that she only remained friends with it because it happened to be her near relation. These ladies whom Lord Wargrave had invited partly for the reason that they were distant cousins of Mrs. Pole's, well rewarded his kindness by the effusion with which they met her, in addition to pleasing him by their evident admiration of Countess Shimna. "Your mother," he said to Pole, nudging him with a confidential elbow, "will very soon find herself amongst a set of friends she likes. That's why I asked those two. I always tell Lady Fermanagh that she's the chaperon of the Roman Church in England. It's a pity your mother's not a Catholic. In that case she'd have a society ready made for her." At this juncture there was announced an attaché from the French Embassy, with brown suede gloves and hair cut like a tooth-brush; and then, a moment later, Countess O'Keefe entered. She was

very different now from what she had been on board the yacht. She was all in rustling black, and though her hair was yellow as ever, the soul of Church and Sunday was fashionably embodied in her bonnet. Her very bracelets were heavy with a sort of mundane sanctity, and her hands were befittingly encumbered with a prayer-book, and a jewelled smelling-bottle. When Lord Wargrave welcomed her and conducted her to Mrs. Pole she involuntarily cast at him a glance of furtive freemasonry, but this was the only sign of the old Adam which she exhibited, and to Mrs. Pole, her manner was florid with Christian virtue. She embraced her daughter, and gave her a scented kiss, with a nice restraint that was a model of drawing-room maternity. She greeted Pole as a cousin and good comrade; and dropped Lady Fermanagh such a dignified continental courtesy, that the elderly limbs of the latter involuntarily did their best to imitate it. The Countess was now the centre of a small circle, and began to rattle and ripple with so easy a volubility, that she captivated her new acquaintances by saving them from the difficulty of talking to her.

"I fear I am so late," she said, in her

best foreign staccato, which she always employed as a shield against English criticizm, "but really the sermon of Father Burke was so long-good, yes-but long, and I afterwards had to see a very young little friend of mine—a bairn," she said laughing benignantly; "is not that what you call them? Mrs. Pole knows. It's a baby relation of ours," she continued in explanation, "whose mother is dead; and it has to be left in England. My daughter Shimna has been too kind to it-an angel." And then the Countess, as if a chance subject were done with, asked Lady Fermanagh if she too had been listening to Father Burke; and paused with deferential sweetness to let the other ladies speak.

"The Duke of Dulverton," said the voice of Lord Wargrave's servant. "Luncheon," growled Lord Wargrave promptly into his servant's ear; and by the time he had done so, the Duke of Dulverton with his spectacles had shuffled into the room, which he confronted with an interrogatory smile. He found that he knew all present, except the young Attaché and the Countess; and as the Countess happened to be standing against the light, he had exchanged words with the

others before he even saw her plainly. When he did see her and was presented to her, Pole noted with amusement that a curious expression passed over his face, as if he had been expecting something out of the way, and had found precisely what he expected. "I'm sorry to hear," he said, "you're paying London so short a visit; but we are all of us very thankful to you for leaving us your charming daughter. She is the next best thing, since we can't keep her mother—the next best thing." A moment later, when the Countess had turned away from him, he pulled Lord Wargrave by the sleeve and quietly drew him into a window. "Oh, ho," he said, "I know her. My dear fellow, I recollect her well. She was staying at Spa twenty years ago with D-. I never spoke to her; I was not alone myself then: but I'll tell you what, Wargrave-I used to think D- a devilish lucky fellow. I should like to occupy D--'s old place at luncheon." Lord Wargrave, who avowedly set a high value on dukes, was only too delighted to comply with his friend's wishes, and the Duke, as he subsequently confessed, "had a monstrous pleasant party." He drew the Countess and Lady Fermanagh

both into conversation with himself, and when the latter was warming into friendly sympathy with the former, he would allude to some bal masqué, some race-meeting, or some question of gambling, and say, "Let us ask the Countess; when the Countess played at Spa, or when the Countess backed a horse, every one said she was always sure to win." Countess Shimna, meanwhile, was admired and approved of by everybody, and the Duke was constantly watching her in spite of his pre-occupation with her mother. To one of the party, however, she gave a certain amount of uneasiness. Her neighbour was the young Attaché; and suddenly between him and her the discovery of some mutual acquaintance set fire to a conversation which leapt up and burnt and sparkled, and hardly ceased till they all of them went back again to the drawing-room. The person rendered uneasy by this occurrence was Pole. He was not jealous, but it was a new and unpleasant experience to him to see Countess Shimna show any particular interest in any one saving himself, who was on the sunny side of fifty. The young Attaché, however, was unable to linger long; and whatever uneasiness he had caused

went with him out of the street door. "Shimna, darling," cooed the Countess," I must say good-bye to you now. Come and see your mother before she goes off on Tuesday, and don't forget your pretty little baby cousin. Dear Mrs. Pole," she added, "I must positively be hurrying away. At halfpast three I've an appointment with Father Burke." And then turning to the Catholic ladies, whose hearts she knew would be conquered by this communication, "The best friend," she said, "that I ever had was a Jesuit." The Duke, meanwhile, had just appropriated Countess Shimna, to whom he had hitherto hardly spoken a word.

"I suppose," he said to her, "you have not many engagements yet. Very well—don't engage yourself for Wednesday fortnight. The Duchess will ask you to a little party at my house. You have seen my house in the country. I will show you my house in London. What—there's your mother going. I can give her a lift in my brougham—either to Father Burke, or to the Cardinal Archbishop if she wants him."

"My dear," said Lord Wargrave to Countess Shimna, when the last guest had departed, "if nothing else happens in the social world this autumn, you will at all events see two of the most brilliant parties possible. At the dinner to which you have just been asked, and the Duchess's ball to which you will be, you are sure to see the very best that the society of London can offer you."

Lord Wargrave thought that Countess Shimna was less impressed than she should have been: but he solaced himself with the thought that she would know better presently.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE Duke's invitation, so far as Countess Shimna was concerned, was very far from being the sole social result of the luncheon party. The two Catholic ladies, whose gentle and estimable natures recognized in Mrs. Pole an excellence that was akin to their own, were delighted to gather her under the dove-like wings of cousinship; indeed, the faith, the hope, and the charity with which they were so largely gifted, led them to see in her something better than a cousin, or even many cousins, namely, a possible convert; whilst as for her young friend, though they looked on her somewhat doubtfully, both on account of her dangerous beauty and of the justice her toilet did to it. she was at all events a member of the true flock already, and thus had a natural claim on them to shield her with a wholesome entourage. The consequence was that Mrs.

Pole and Countess Shimna were themselves, the very next day, entertained at luncheon by Lady Fermanagh, and introduced to a circle of her intimates, of whom some in early days had been actually known to Mrs. Pole, whilst they all of them knew all about her.

Of the many sections that make up English Society, none is more charming than that composed of those Catholic families whose reverence for themselves and their religion has remained sufficiently high to keep them indifferent to the rivalry of contemporary gentile fashion. Countess Shimna's new friends, although they, like Lady Fermanagh, thought her manner and her appearance too finished for an unmarried girl, approached her with an air of deferential and yet motherly friendship, which called to her responsive face its expression of fascinating gratitude. It is true that the Catholic young ladies, to whom she was gradually introduced as companions, and who showed a strong inclination to whisper with her in confidential corners, did not succeed in penetrating very far into her sympathies by their restless ripple of talk about dresses and balls and knitting, or

even about the horses on which they rode, or some lectures on literature which they attended. This prattle, light as feathers, and the eagerness of the girls' eyes, inclined Countess Shimna alternately to laugh and sigh. But so great was her perception of any good-will shown her, and she instinctively responded to it with such a caress of thankfulness, that her new playmates were charmed as well as a little awed by her; and she, for her part, had the not unpleasant sensation that she had, by some miracle, slipped back to her convent-school again.

As for her child and its nurses, a suitable lodging had been found in a place not far off, which Pole's ingenuity had suggested. This was a house adjoining the well-known Catholic Church, in which Countess Shimna's mother had so profited by her Jesuit's sermons—a house often occupied by various reverend Fathers, and possessing a door at the back which gave access to the ecclesiastical precincts. Here the child and attendants of a distinguished Catholic family were sure of advantages and attention which they could not have counted on elsewhere. It had also occurred to Pole that the young

and unacknowledged mother, who would presumably select this church for the performance of her religious duties, would be able, by means of the private door that has been mentioned, to avoid inconvenient notice when she visited her little girl daily. He found that his forethought was in every way justified; and the frequency with which she was seen in the neighbourhood of Father Burke's church atoned, in the eyes of her new Catholic friends, for her excess of worldly charms, by investing her with a reputation for devoutness.

Thus a week went by. Of society, in the sense of any formal parties, neither she or Mrs. Pole saw anything. Indeed, in spite of Lord Wargrave's prophecies, there was not much to see; and he himself had gone off to a fashionable shooting-party in the country. He himself never shot, but he approved of sport in others, as a means of purging houses of dangerous and inferior rivals. Quiet intimacies, however, such as those that have been just described, produced pleasant incidents for Countess Shimna every day; and the social atmosphere in which she now was moving—an atmosphere placid with a sense of lineage

and mutual relationship—recalled much to her with which she was instinctively familiar as an Austrian.

As for Pole, a number of days elapsed before any occasion arose for his speaking in the House of Commons; and he was far too reserved, and in some ways far too indifferent, to attempt to air his eloquence till the exigencies of business called on him. But his life as a politician was full, and was daily becoming fuller. He found that in private his opinion was being sought and deferred to by many of the most influential and most experienced members of his party; the Prime Minister had treated him with exceptional consideration and attention; and all this, together with the manner of Countess Shimna, who still seemed to like him the better because he showed he had a life apart from her, made the present thrill in touching him, like a sort of ether spray, which, not by its coldness but by its warmth, was an anodyne for the sufferings of the past.

Countess Shimna, indeed, both in her own mental condition and in her demeanour towards himself, was beyond what had been his most sanguine hopes. She was recovering,

so it seemed to him, a healthy friendliness with the world, without being seduced by its frivolities. He was pleased to note the eagerness with which she read the papers, in the hopes, as he divined rightly, of discovering his own praises in them; and he had the stimulating sense that, however strong might be her feelings for him, every fresh distinction he won for himself would have a tendency to make them stronger. The tint of her cheeks, her dress and the grace that moved in it, the homage of the looks that would follow her when she appeared in public, and the tender memories swimming in her eyes when she looked at him, mixed themselves with a faith that her life might in every way complete his. She became a part of his ambition, both for himself and for the public good; and when images of success fantastically came to him in his sleep, the perfume that always went with her came floating and lingering through his dreams.

At length the day arrived when he was to make what would be his maiden speech. Lord Wargrave, who meanwhile had returned to London for a night or two, and had left it again in response to an invitation of the nature of a command, was back, bustling with punctuality, in order to be present at the event; and was brimming with anecdotes of the various pithy phrases in which he had commended to Royal interest the talents of the rising statesman. His only disappointment was that Countess Shimna, being slightly indisposed, was unable to go down to the House with hima disappointment in which she evidently shared. Pole, however, who took a singularly impartial view of the amount of general interest that would attach to what he had to say, was far from sorry to think that her impressions of him as a public man were not to be first formed from such an exceedingly tame exhibition of himself. Nor, perhaps, was this view unjustified by probabilities. The occasion of his speech was a Bill that was to be introduced by a notorious Ultra-Radical, relating to the regulation of certain East-End industries. It was a Bill which, as was known, was limited in its immediate scope, but it embodied principles capable of far wider application, and fatal, in the opinion of its opponents, to the elementary rights of property. Such a mass of sensational facts. however, such statistics of injustice and suffering, had been got together by its supporters in order to prove its necessity, and so telling an exposition of these was expected in the Ultra-Radical's speech, that fears were entertained by the Government lest some even of their own followers should be led astray by it. The speech was made. The expectations of the speaker's friends were exceeded by what they heard. The facts and figures were there, sharp in their detail, ominous in their significance, and enunciated with a sarcastic calm, which seemed to make them bite and burn. In spite of the rancour by which the whole was disfigured, the effect it produced was powerful, and parts of it seemed conclusive even to many who held the speaker in detestation.

Pole's reply, therefore, was awaited with unusual interest. If the House had expected anything that is commonly called oratory, it was signally disappointed; for the manner of the new speaker was deliberate and unimpassioned in the extreme. It was soon perceived, however, that he possessed three most valuable qualities—an unusual clearness of utterance, an absolute familiarity with

his facts, and a command of argumentative weapons, coupled with a contemptuous goodnature in the use of them.

"The honourable member," he said, "has produced the undeniably strong impression which he has produced, by two distinct means - firstly, by his description of the distress which he proposes to remedy, and secondly, by his description of his remedies. If it is not invidious to compare them, I will take upon me to say that the first of these have been the most powerful. I will deal therefore with that first. The statistics which he has put forward, with so much energy and lucidity, do not come on me as a surprise; nor has he quoted them without ample authority. So far as they are concerned, indeed, though I am not in the honourable member's confidence, I venture to assert that I could have written his speech for him beforehand: and I venture to assert this because I knew beforehand the precise authorities which the honourable member would consult. They are the authorities on which invariably he and his friends rely. And as I have said already, they are ample. Their only fault is that they are worthless. I will read a list of the works, the articles.

the pamphlets, and the political leaflets, which I recognize, from the evidence of his speech, as the sources of the honourable member's inspiration. There is a set of pamphlets especially," he continued, when he had read his list, "which the honourable member will recognize as particularly intimate friends; because they have supplied him not only with many of his figures, but with more than one of his most remarkable and pungent sentences. The author of those pamphlets conceals his personality under a pseudonym. He calls himself 'Labour,' The honourable member is doubtless ignorant as to who his authority is. I will inform him. He was formerly a salesman in Bethnell Green market. He was subsequently a tout for a firm of East End money-lenders; then a secretary of an East End Socialist organization; and at the present moment his domicile is Dartmoor Prison. Had he signed himself 'Hard Labour' instead of 'Labour,' his nom de plume would have been more felicitous. Well, amongst the honourable member's most stirring and startling assertions are the following." Pole recapitulated them. "These," he said, "occur in the original edition of 'Labour's' pamphlets.

I presume, therefore, that the honourable member has studied these pamphlets for a long time. He seems unaware, however, that every one of these special statements was withdrawn, as a libel, under threat of legal proceedings; the first edition was suppressed; and in subsequent editions the statements do not occur. It would be well, perhaps," the speaker continued, "that the honourable member should remember that first editions have a greater value for the book-collector than for the politician."

Pole then proceeded to examine, with results very similar, the rest of the facts and figures brought forward by the radical "The honourable member," he said, in concluding this portion of his speech, "asserts that he could give us the names of fifty firms in the East End who have been guilty towards their employees of the abominable practices to which he alludes. I could forgive the honourable member of his ignorance of any authorities an appeal to which would involve much research, or even much arithmetic, but I cannot forgive him for having overlooked the London Post Office Directory and those Trade Directories which would have given him even ampler information. Had he referred to all, or to any one of them, he would have found that the London firms to which he makes allusion are at the present moment only twenty-five in number, and have never, during the past ten years, exceeded the number of twenty-That there is great suffering in connection with the trades in question, I admit. A man may suffer agonies if he happens to sprain his ankle: but the description of the situation as given by the honourable member represents the truth of the matter not more nearly than a description of a man with a sprained ankle would, which represented him as having broken every bone in his body. The honourable member, in short, is but one more example of the curious delusion so dear, through all ages, to the school of which he is himself an ornament—that because it may be impossible to exaggerate the pain of an injury, it is impossible to exaggerate its extent. This is the delusion of the Socialist; it is the delusion of the child who has had a tumble: it is also the delusion of the nursery-maid; but I trust it may never be said to be the delusion of this House."

Pole's victory thus far was an easy one,

though he was probably the only person present who could have at that moment accomplished it: and a second victory followed, which, if as easy, was no less signal. Coming to the Bill itself, he acquainted the House with a fact of which no one present appeared to have the slightest knowledge-that in three Continental States experiments had been actually made of a kind precisely similar to those which this Bill aimed at introducing; and he then proceeded, with a mass of minute and overwhelming evidence, to show how in every respect these experiments had completely failed. Only once did his voice or manner betray the presence of the smallest feeling, or the smallest inclination to express it. His words began for a moment to vibrate with an impatient scorn; but he at once checked himself, as if guilty of some slip of the tongue, and he sat down as though the follies and errors he had been combating had been the faults of some damaged machine, and as if he had as little animosity against them. He went home with Lord Wargrave, who, gripping him affectionately by the arm, said-

"In many ways that speech was magnificent. It will be the foundation of a success for you, but it won't be the foundation of popularity."

The practical results of his eloquence need not be mentioned particularly. It is enough to say that, so far as he was able to judge of them, they were far beyond his expectations; and when he lay down to sleep that night, they filled him with a modest wonder, which was keener than his sense of elation, and also did much to deaden it.

The following morning The Times, in a leading article, reproduced with emphasis the principal points made by him, and observed sedately that he had already justified his appointment. Countess Shimna read this at breakfast with a pretty heightening of colour, which made her cheeks for a moment seem hardly perfect without a patch; but what really excited and absorbed her were the far more personal comments which she found before dinner in a wellknown evening paper. The paragraph containing them being as follows:-" The great sensation of the evening, however, was contributed by Mr. Pole, whose voice for the first time was heard by his brother members. Anything less sensational than his language, his matter, and his demeanour

it is hardly possible to imagine. And it was partly to these very causes that the sensation, undeniably produced by him, was due. The evident apathy, almost amounting to boredom, which has, hitherto, been suggested alike by his face and his attitude, had been a source of considerable satisfaction to many enthusiastic Radicals, who had hoped to discover in his appointment one more folly of the Government. One of the principal points of interest in his speech of last night was the suddenness and the completeness with which it dissipated this impression. The House at once perceived that it was listening to a man whose perfect and minute knowledge and keen reasoning powers were made only the more remarkable by the sluggish self-possession of his manner; whilst his refined and fastidious accents gave a similar prominence to the hard and business-like way in which he approached and gripped his subjects. In addition to all this, Mr. Pole's first appearance owed something of its success to various adventitious circumstances—to the unusual suddenness with which he had been pitchforked into public life, to the picturesqueness of his family connections; and perhaps, also, to a fact which was commented on by certain critics in the ladies' gallery—that he had, when speaking, a certain air of abstraction, as though his deepest thoughts were engaged with distant and more serious matters—a criticizm, which, we presume, if translated into bald masculine language, would mean that he was interesting because he seemed to be so little interested."

"Ah," said Countess Shimna to him that night, "you will be a great man! You will make me proud of you."

"I," he replied, "should value another feeling more."

She was going up to bed, as she spoke to him; and leaning over the banisters, extended her hand to him, which he pressed to his lips and kissed.

London had not even yet socially fulfilled the expectancy of Lord Wargrave; but the following evening was to be the evening of a great event—the dinner-party at Dulverton House, to which Countess Shimna had been invited. Mrs. Pole, who had also been pressed to come, knew the world and herself a great deal too well to be inclined for the sort of society she would encounter on this occasion; so Brook Street contributed but

three guests to the feast—Countess Shimna. Pole, and Lord Wargrave, who delighted in the post of chaperon. At five minutes to eight, a carriage with jobbed horses, and with Lord Wargrave's coronet on the panels, was standing patiently at the door; and Lord Wargrave and Pole were stationed at the foot of the stairs when Countess Shimna descended, shimmering in her pink cloak, and radiant with anticipations of the evening. When the carriage drew up, not many minutes later, under the shade of the portico with which Dulverton House was dignified, when the opening door emitted a flood of lamplight, which fell upon red baize and beaconed her on to brilliance, and when Pole was following her as closely as the length of her train permitted, that same newspaper paragraph which she had read the previous evening, and which still remained in her mind as a source of pride and pleasure, was coming, in a house far off in the country, for the first time, under the eyes of another woman.

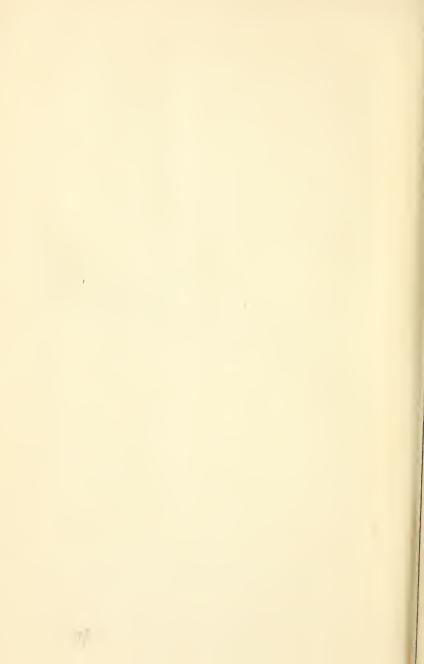
The woman was seated near the hearth of a large ill-lit drawing-room, where a glimmer of burning logs was playing over a threadbare carpet—a woman with soft blond hair, and cheeks tender as rose-petals. Her head was bent, and a shadowy smile was on her lips, of which the cause was evident. Her lap supported the burden of a little boy—

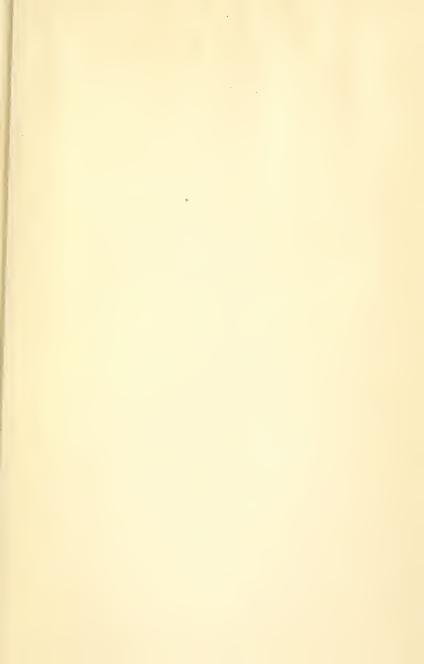
"And like a star upon her bosom lay His beautiful and shining forehead."

Whilst she was thus preoccupied a newspaper, just come by post, was brought to her. Close to her chair was a shaded lamp, the one lamp in the room; and leaning towards it she began languidly to read. Suddenly she started, her indifferent gaze became a stare; and for some moments. motionless as if she had been petrified, she was poring over the lines in which Pole was described and criticized. Then the paper fell suddenly from her hand; she looked at her child's face, turned it tenderly in different ways, scrutinized the curves of his mouth, and lifted his curling hair. All at once her eye became brimmed with moisture. With childish precipitancy she rubbed it helplessly away, and stooping, hid her face on that of her little boy. A footstep roused her, and she looked up. "What, nurse!" she said. "And is it his bedtime already? Come, he must give his mammy one kiss more and

go." When she was left alone she turned to a writing-table that was close to her, and her eyes again brimming over, she pulled to herself a sheet of note-paper. "I must write to him," she said. "I will write;" and she seized a pen. But all she did was to look helplessly at the paper, the quill for some reason remaining idle in her hand. At last, with a petulant melancholy, she dashed its points down upon the blotting-book and broke them. At the same instant a servant announced dinner; and rising abruptly, and snatching up some book at random, she moved away through the shadows alone to a lonely meal.

END OF VOL. II.





UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

RECTO LO-UNE JUI 2 1984		
	•	

L9-15m-10,'48(B1039)444

PR 4972 M29h v.2

